

JEFF BUCKLEY ★ DMA'S ★ THE 1975 ★ INSIDE GITMO

# Rolling Stone

Issue 773 April 2016  
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ALT-ROCK  
SURVIVORS

# Violent Soho

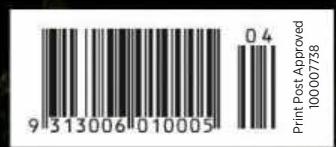
How they beat the odds  
to become Australia's  
best rock band

Chris  
Martin  
Heartache  
& Healing

Black  
Sabbath's  
Last Ride

A Beach Boy  
Looks Back  
in Anger

Hot in  
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Recently discovered in the Sony Music archives during the research for the 20th anniversary edition of Buckley's Grace album, the performances on You And I are a revelation, an intimate portrait of the artist performing a variety of cover songs and original music.

These 10 tracks offer an incredible, rare glimpse of an artist, alone, in the sacred space that is the studio. There's an intimacy and an honesty to the performances that's literally breathtaking.

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# MICHAEL JACKSON

## OFF THE WALL



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This exclusive edition of Michael Jackson's revolutionary 1979 recording *Off The Wall* includes the original album bundled with the new documentary *Michael Jackson's Journey from Motown to Off the Wall*, directed by Spike Lee.

*Michael Jackson's Journey from Motown to Off the Wall*, director Spike Lee assembles a wealth of archival footage, including material from Michael's personal archive, interviews with contemporary talents and family members, and Michael's own words and image to create this insightful chronicle from the star's early rise to fame through the release of this seminal album. A look at a chapter of his career that is rarely examined, *Michael Jackson's Journey from Motown to Off the Wall* allows audiences to travel with Michael as he gets his start at Motown, strikes a new path with CBS Records, and forges a relationship with legendary producer Quincy Jones. An illuminated portrait emerges of how an earnest, passionate, hard-working boy would become the "King of Pop."



# RS773

"ALL THE NEWS THAT FITS"

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**ON THE COVER** Violent Soho, photographed in Brisbane in January 2016 by **Kane Hibberd**.

PEGGY SIROTA

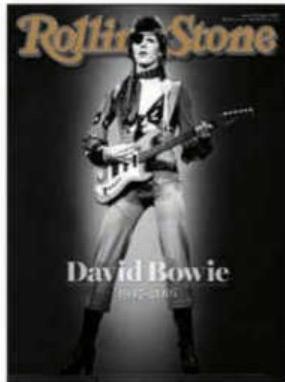


A close-up photograph of Chris Martin, the lead singer of Coldplay. He is lying on his stomach in a grassy field under a bright blue sky with scattered clouds. He has light brown hair and is looking directly at the camera with a slight smile. His right hand is resting against his head, and his left arm is bent, with his hand resting on the grass. He is wearing a dark jacket over a teal t-shirt and a necklace with a small heart-shaped pendant. A pink and purple tie-dye cloth is draped over his shoulders.

Chris Martin  
photographed in  
Westlake Village,  
California, on  
January 8th, 2016.  
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# CORRESPONDENCE

LOVE LETTERS & ADVICE



## Brilliant Bowie

WHAT A FABULOUS TRIBUTE to the great David Bowie [RS 772]. As a massive fan, I just loved that cover. Already framed it! David Bowie was a unique talent and you captured his brilliance. This issue has instant book-shelf status. I will be keeping this in a safe, accessible place. All Bowie fans feel the void and wish he was still here. David Bowie was a beautiful human being!

Carol Nathaniel,  
Riverview, NSW

## Bad Call

WHAT WERE SEAN PENN and ROLLING STONE thinking in interviewing El Chapo [RS 772]? By bringing attention to the man and giving him no less than 14 pages you/Penn did nothing but glorify this evil man and make him into

some sort of folk hero. I'm glad El Chapo got captured – I just hope Sean Penn and RS have a think about their priorities.

Gerard Field  
Kensington, NSW

## Rising Star

HOPE CHRISTOPHER CHANDLER (Correspondence March 2016) enjoyed Rolling Stone's 16-page tribute to the perennially pubescent David Bowie.

and tours. The only real way to ensure you don't miss out on something good is by regularly checking a dozen or so websites. I have missed many shows now that I would have wanted to see, the most recent being Leon Bridges. I think it would be great if ROLLING STONE had a small section just listing the upcoming shows that are must-see.

Christopher Chandler  
Sydney, NSW

**"By bringing attention to El Chapo you did nothing but glorify this man and make him into some sort of folk hero."**

Respectively, Troye Sivan deserves February's front cover and his fame. He's a thoughtful songwriter and vocalist. His music feels beautifully cinematic, emotionally raw, honest and compassionate. We're bidding farewell with Bowie's *Blackstar*. We're also greeting Sivan, a rising star.

Matt Rocke  
Clarinda, Vic

## On the Street

ONE OF THE BIG PROBLEMS with the changes to media due to the internet is the closing of street press. This has made it much more difficult to find out about upcoming shows

## Is It the End?

WHILST LOOKING FORWARD to Black Sabbath's upcoming tour, I'm somewhat sceptical about it really being "The End". In 1999 I flew to Birmingham to witness what was then being billed as their last ever show – and lo and behold, here we are, 17 years later and they're doing it again! Kiss are another act guilty of playing the "last tour card" – didn't we bid them farewell some time in the Nineties? It's hard not to feel like bands are playing their fans for fools – and yet we still play along with them.

Jim Tregonning,  
Altona, Vic

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RALPH J. GLEASON 1917-1975

HUNTER S. THOMPSON 1937-2005

## WRITE TO US AND WIN

Every letter published in this issue will win a CD pack containing *Ephemera* by Little Green Cars, *All My Demons Greeting Me As a Friend* by AURORA, and *Girl At the End Of the World* by James, valued at \$59.85, thanks to Liberator Music. Write to us and tell us your thoughts on the magazine or life in general. But please, keep it brief!

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SCREW IT, LET'S RIDE.



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## MUSIC

### → RICK RUBIN: MY LIFE IN 20 SONGS

The Def Jam co-founder reflects on more than 30 years of producing classic records, from the Beastie Boys' *Licensed to Ill*, LL Cool J's *Radio* and the Red Hot Chili Peppers' *Blood Sugar Sex Magik* to the Dixie Chicks' *Taking the Long Way* and Kanye West's *Yeezus*. "There's a time to strip back an artist's sound," Rubin says, "but sometimes it makes sense to do the exact opposite."



**EXCLUSIVE**

#### → HENRY WAGONS PERFORMS ACOUSTIC

Showcasing songs from his first solo album, Henry Wagons strips things back in the Rolling Stone offices.



**RECAP**

#### → THE WALKING DEAD S6 IN-DEPTH

We know that talking about *The Walking Dead* is almost as good as watching it before someone spoils it for you, so we get in before everyone else.



**REVIEW**

#### → KANYE WEST ‘THE LIFE OF PABLO’

The only way a Kanye record could surprise us now is if he announced a release date ahead of time and stuck by it. How does his gospel epic rate?



**RECAP**

#### → VINYL EACH EPISODE RECAPPED

Martin Scorsese and Mick Jagger's epic HBO music-biz drama is event-TV for music fans, but is it holding up to the hype?



The 1975

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# Random Notes



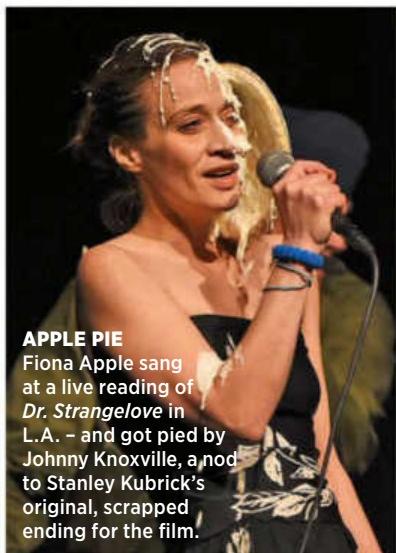
## BEYONCÉ'S FIELD OF DREAMS

Beyoncé floored the crowd during the Pepsi Super Bowl 50 Halftime Show at Levi's Stadium on February 7th in San Francisco. As far as halftime performances go, Bey kicked it out of the park. Chris Martin, not so much...



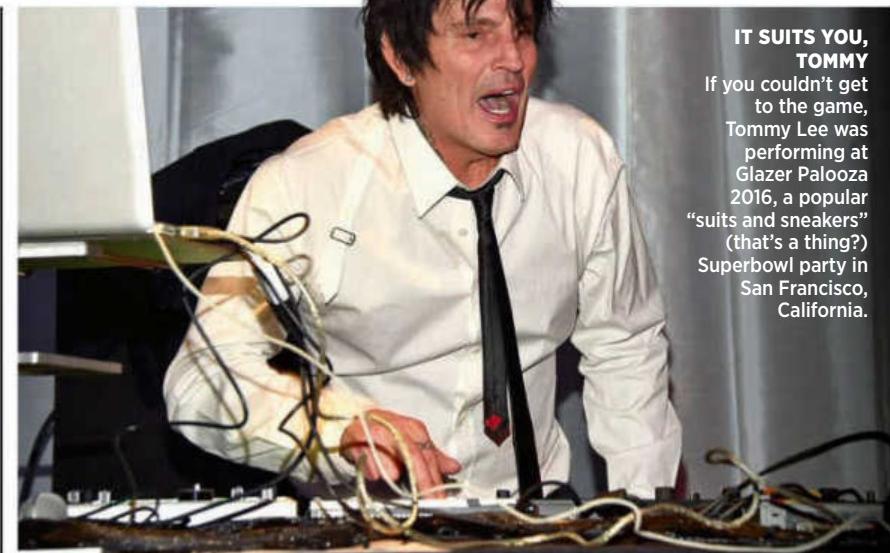
## Stones: Red-Hot in Chile!

After two weeks of L.A. rehearsals, the Rolling Stones arrived at soundcheck at Estadio Nacional in Santiago, Chile, for opening night of their South American tour. "I'm excited to go some places I've never been – Peru, Bolivia," said Ronnie Wood. "It'll be good fun!" Before the tour, the band also reportedly squeezed in studio time for its first album since 2005. "It's my pulse – being in the studio and kicking ideas about," Keith Richards said recently. "It's still a turn-on!"



### APPLE PIE

Fiona Apple sang at a live reading of *Dr. Strangelove* in L.A. – and got pied by Johnny Knoxville, a nod to Stanley Kubrick's original, scrapped ending for the film.



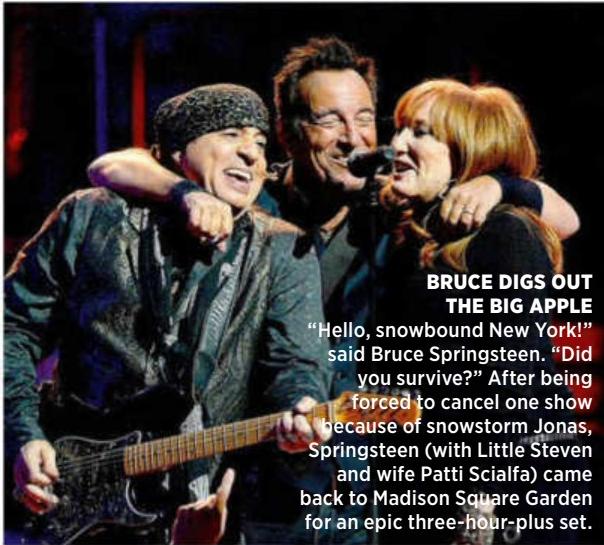
### IT SUITS YOU, TOMMY

If you couldn't get to the game, Tommy Lee was performing at Glazer Palooza 2016, a popular "suits and sneakers" (that's a thing?) Superbowl party in San Francisco, California.



## Buddy Messes With the Kid

Leon Bridges stopped in on Buddy Guy's residency at the bluesman's Chicago club, Legends, sitting in with Guy for a duet of Muddy Waters' "She's 19 Years Old". "I just made up my lyrics along the way," admitted Bridges afterward. "It was a great moment." Bridges was also invited up to Guy's office, where he keeps the cognac and corn liquor, and Guy complimented the young singer on his sharp wardrobe. "He was the most humble guy," says Bridges.



**BRUCE DIGS OUT THE BIG APPLE**  
"Hello, snowbound New York!" said Bruce Springsteen. "Did you survive?" After being forced to cancel one show because of snowstorm Jonas, Springsteen (with Little Steven and wife Patti Scialfa) came back to Madison Square Garden for an epic three-hour-plus set.



## Folk Power!

Joan Baez invited friends Mavis Staples (left), Paul Simon and Emmylou Harris to celebrate her 75th birthday at New York's Beacon Theatre. Baez cracked up the crowd with a story about a guy who asked her for an autograph for his grandmother. "[I said] tell your grandmother to go fuck herself!"



**FEELING HERSELF** Nicki Minaj touched up at a 76ers-Warriors game in Philly. Minaj recently announced she's producing a television show, *Nicki*, based on her early life.

**BLONDE AMBITION**  
Justin Bieber and Lady Gaga both stepped out of their comfort zones for a recent Saint Laurent show in L.A., Bieber by not wearing a hoody, Gaga by not wearing eyebrows.



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MY LIFE IN TEN SONGS JEFF LYNNE PG. 18 | PROFILE DMA'S ON THEIR NEW LP PG. 22

# Rock & Roll

Photo: Jeff Kravitz/FilmMagic

GO CRAZY!  
Osbourne on  
stage in Chicago  
in January.

## Black Sabbath's Last Ride

On the road with Ozzy and Co.  
as the band kicks off its final  
tour ever **By Kory Grow**

**W**EELCOME TO THE END," OZZY OSBOURNE says to 20,000 fans at Chicago's United Center. He's dressed head-to-toe in black, and his band has just wrung every ounce of Gothic gloom from its opening dirge, "Black Sabbath", but now Ozzy sounds more wistful than scary. "Can you believe it, man? From 1968 till now."

Nearly half a century after they first scared the bejesus out of rock fans, Black Sabbath have [Cont. on 14]

## BLACK SABBATH

[Cont. from 13] begun their victory lap. The End, a big, fiery farewell tour for some of rock's most primal visionaries, includes stops in New Zealand and Australia in April, their first shows here since 2013, and could stretch at least into next year, band members say.

Osbourne says the idea to call it quits "just kind of happened" – a mutual decision among him, guitarist Tony Iommi and bassist Geezer Butler. By ending now, Black Sabbath are saying goodbye before overstaying their welcome. "I don't want to drag it into the dirt," Osbourne says. "The best thing that happened to Sabbath the first time was we went our own ways for a while [in 1979]. It was good for them and good for me." Osbourne is sure the decision is final. "You could put money on it," he says.

"It'll be bittersweet," says Butler, looking ahead to the eventual last show. "I'm glad we're finishing on a high note but sad that it's the end of what I've known for most of my life."

The scene in Chicago, however, is more like a celebration than a funeral. The audience trades verses with Osbourne during a fearsomely heavy "War Pigs" and headbangs on live rarities like "After Forever" and "Hand of Doom". The band seems as carefree as the crowd. Iommi nimbly refigures some of his guitar leads into outré blues experiments, and Butler toys with a wah-wah during his solo break before "N.I.B.", giving the concert an air of unpredictability. Most surprising: The band is all smiles throughout the show. "We love you all," Osbourne tells the crowd.

As has been much reported, one key part of the Sabbath story is absent from the party. Drummer Bill Ward split from the group shortly after the bandmates announced they would reunite in 2011 for their first new album with the original lineup in 33 years; he claimed they did not offer him a "signable contract". He has feuded publicly with his former bandmates in the years since, after Osbourne described him as "incredibly overweight" and unfit to tour.

The group enlisted Tommy Clufetos, who plays in Osbourne's solo band, to drum on tour. Ward tells *ROLLING STONE* in a statement that he and his management reached out to Sabbath's manageri-

al team with an offer to return to the band for the End tour. "We were told there was no interest," Ward says.

Butler, for his part, claims neutrality, or at least ignorance. "We still get on great," he says of his relationship with the drummer. "We still can talk to each other. It's just that I have no idea what went on in the background. I don't know who to believe, and I don't really delve into it."

"I'd rather not talk about it, actually," Osbourne says. "As soon as I start talking

Before the tour, the band batted around the idea of recording a follow-up to *13*, with Iommi reporting that he had "a whole load" of riffs at the ready. But Butler says he had put the kibosh on the idea. "I was just being logical," the bassist says. "At the time, we were given six months to write and record an album, and I said, 'There's absolutely no way.'" He laughs. By his estimation, the last LP took three years to make. "We'll probably all be dead by then," he says dryly.

Instead of making a new record, the band is selling a limited-edition tour-only CD, titled *The End*, on the road. It contains four outtakes from the *13* sessions, which range in tone from the trudging, tumultuous "Season of the Dead" to the murky, bluesy "Isolated Man", as well as four live recordings. After the End tour, they'll decide whether Black Sabbath will ever hit the studio again.

"Time ain't on our side," says Osbourne, 67. "To be honest with you, if the new record wasn't another Number One, we would have been pissed off, so we just left it on a high note with *13*. I'm not saying I'll never record with Tony or Geezer again. I just don't want to tour with Black Sabbath after this."

Life on the road these days couldn't be more different from their initial run in the 1970s. The band is taking regular breaks so that Iommi can have his blood tested, and Osbourne is looking out for his health as well. He's three years sober and does an hour of cardio a day. Butler, a lifetime vegetarian, has become vegan. It's a stark contrast to the band's heavy-partying days, when its drug and alcohol intake was the stuff of legend. "We're not killing ourselves [anymore]," Osbourne says. "It doesn't get any easier physically. I don't know how the fucking Stones do it."

"Now we have private planes and the best suites in the best hotels, but the downside is there's no drugs and no women," Butler says with a laugh. "You come offstage and have a cup of tea and go to bed."

"I was the fucking rebel for so many years," says Osbourne. "Now I can't understand why I was going out, getting full of Jack Daniel's, having a bag of white powder and talking shit till daybreak, thinking that was fun. I would poke my fucking eyes out if I had to do that now."



**THE GODFATHERS**  
Tony Iommi, Ozzy Osbourne and Geezer Butler (from left) at the 2014 Grammys.

**"We [stay in] the best hotels, but the downside is there's no drugs and no women," laughs Butler.**

about Bill Ward, I get about 500 fucking slaggings in the post."

After deciding to move ahead without Ward, Sabbath faced another, more serious crisis. In 2012, Iommi revealed he had been diagnosed with lymphoma. Still, he dedicated himself to writing the band's 19th studio release, *13*, which debuted at Number One on the U.S. chart in 2013. "I thought the last tour was going to be the end," Butler says of Sabbath's 2014 run. "This time, we thought, 'Well, we got one more tour left in us – let's go out and do it while we can.'" Iommi's outlook is looking up, according to Butler. "I think the cancer has sort of at least gone away, for now, anyway," he says.

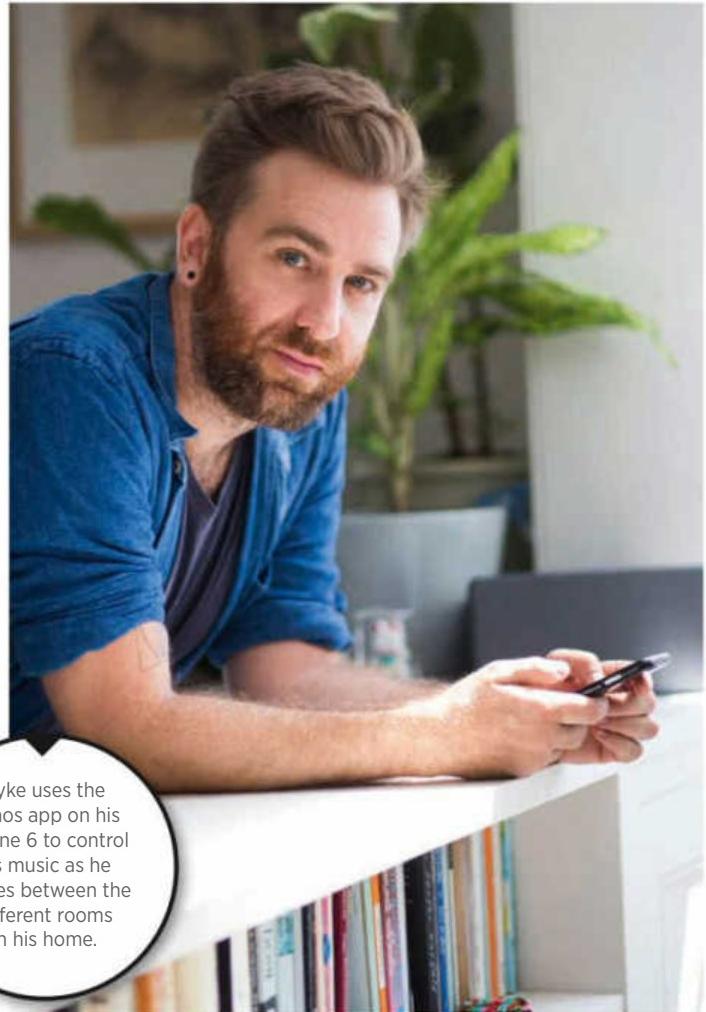


AT HOME WITH

# JOSH PYKE

The ARIA Award-winner explains how Sonos has changed the way he listens to music at home.

Despite having a recording studio at the back of his Sydney home, Josh Pyke says he found it hard to listen to music as much as he'd liked to before he got his Sonos system. "It's changed the way I listen to music," says Pyke. "Now I can be out the back, streaming music from my record player or Apple Music, and I can switch it through to the kitchen and keep listening while I cook dinner for the family." Pyke has an interesting configuration in his home. He has PLAY:3s in his kitchen and dining areas, and a PLAY:5 in his studio with a CONNECT hooked up to his turntable to blast some obscure old school vinyl he's collected over the years (like his rare Nirvana "Come As You Are" 12").



Pyke uses the Sonos app on his iPhone 6 to control his music as he moves between the different rooms in his home.

# Tonight Alive's Big Break

**Former pop-punkers embrace arena sound on motivational third album**

**S**YDNEY QUINTET TONIGHT ALIVE weren't afraid to set ambitious goals for their new LP, *Limitless*. "We wanted to create something timeless and iconic," says frontwoman Jenna McDougall. "We decided to do something musically that isn't being done now and hasn't been done for a long time."

That meant abandoning the punk-inflected sound that has won the band a global fanbase over the past five years and reaching for the stadium territory occupied by U2 and Coldplay. *Limitless* is unashamedly anthemic and deliberately inspirational; an album for kids who have rejected rock & roll's self-destructive narrative and are searching for something uplifting.

McDougall grew up in Sydney's religious Hills District and joined Tonight Alive when she was 16 because she felt like a social outcast. "I was at an all-girls school, listening to Blink and Simple Plan and Green Day," she says. "That was the music that made me feel normal."

The band gathered momentum quickly, but McDougall found touring Australia and the United States with other alternative musicians to be almost as alienating as high school. "I used to think I wasn't a rock star because I didn't make crude jokes on stage and I didn't get smashed," she admits. "I felt disconnected from our touring buddies – I couldn't relate to them."



Tonight Alive  
(McDougall, centre)

By the time they began working on the follow-up to their international breakthrough LP, *The Other Side*, McDougall and Co. were longing for a change in attitude. "We made a conscious decision," she says: "we would set ourselves apart and establish a new sound." The band sought out co-writers like David Hodges (Evanescence, Kelly Clarkson) to help them reinvent themselves. McDougall decided to shift focus lyrically, and take a more active role in empowering the band's younger listeners. "I put more intention behind the words I wrote than ever before," she says.

Tonight Alive took the new songs to veteran Canadian producer David Bendeth

(Paramore, Taking Back Sunday), hoping to benefit from his famed perfectionism and tough-love approach. "He can make you feel like you're a gift to the world," McDougall says, "but he can also make you feel like you're worth nothing."

In the coming months, Tonight Alive's management and record labels will devote considerable resources to *Limitless* in order to introduce the band to non-punk listeners. McDougall says she and her bandmates are raring to spread their new message. "In this position, you're going to be a role model whether you like it or not," she says. "The choice is whether you promote something good or bad."

DAN F. STAPLETON

## TOURING

### BLACKBERRY SMOKE'S SOUTHERN FIRE

#### Hirsute Atlanta rockers get set to stomp Bluesfest

This month, Atlanta, Georgia, Southern rockers Blackberry Smoke will make their Australian debut, looking to sear stages and expand their ever-growing international fanbase at Byron Bay's Bluesfest. "We can't wait," enthuses frontman Charlie Starr. "When we got

the opportunity, everyone was thrilled."

The band came together in 2000 – Starr had already made a record with brothers Brit and Richard Turner and another singer-songwriter, with whom they had a falling out. "But we loved playing together, the three of us. I had some songs of my own, a bit more Southern, so we started jamming on those and it felt really good."

From there, the growth began. With fans including Zac Brown, Gregg Allman and Dierks Bentley, Blackberry Smoke have spent the past 15 years touring hard, winning fans one by one, releasing a slew of lauded albums along the way, the latest being 2015's *Holding All the Roses*. Allman himself has said the band will put Southern rock back on the map – he may well be right.

SAMUEL J. FELL



## FIVE NOTES

# The 1975

MANCHESTER POP-ROCKERS GET FUNKED UP ON SECOND RECORD

### 1 SURPRISE!

The 1975 wasn't the first musical incarnation for Matthew Healy and company, but it was the first with any measure of success. "We had been in bands since we were kids, but the 1975 was when it all fell into place," says the frontman. After years of being knocked back by major labels they set up their own – only working with majors for their debut's distribution. *The 1975* exploded, topping the UK charts, and securing them an opening slot for the Rolling Stones.

### 2 THEY ARE STILL THEIR OWN BOSSSES

Just-released second album *I Like It When You Sleep, For You Are So Beautiful Yet So Unaware Of It* took shape on the road over two years, the demos recorded on laptops before being refined later in the studio. "No one was allowed to know the address of the recording studio," Healy maintains. "Every creative decision is discussed between me and Jamie [Oborne, their band

and label manager]. We don't have any creative compromise – that was part of the deal."

### 3 THEY POKE FUN AT THEMSELVES ON THE ALBUM

"It is very, very self-referential," Healy says. It's also relentlessly self-deprecating – Healy wanted to make jokes of everything that they were criticised for, from their overt poppiness to Healy's "swallowed a dictionary" lyrics.

### 4 THE FAME GAME IS HARD

"I didn't get 'popular' until I was about 24. So it's OK. It would have been different if I was 17 and thinking, 'Well, maybe I am a fucking legend!'" [Laughs] Healy for a while refused to have a personal bodyguard. "I was naive," he says. "Now there will be 200 girls at an airport doing whatever they can to get a photo with me, and I need security to make sure they're safe."

### 5 BRING ON THE FUNK

"All of our music is inherently inspired by black music," explains Healy. *I Like It...* is super-charged with funk rhythms and bubbly, syncopated guitars. "Where those guitars come from is partly from Scritti Politti, partly from Michael Jackson, and some from Barry White."

JULES LEFEVRE



IN FROM  
THE COLD  
The 1975 (Healy,  
second right)

## MY LIFE IN 10 SONGS

# Jeff Lynne



The ELO leader on 'Mr. Blue Sky', producing the Beatles, and why he'd rather have just stayed in the studio

By Andy Greene

**E**VEN WHEN ELECTRIC LIGHT Orchestra were selling millions of albums in the 1970s, only devoted fans knew frontman Jeff Lynne's name – which was just fine by him. "I didn't push myself forward," Lynne says. "It just wasn't in my nature. All I wanted was studio time, more studio time and even more studio time."

After ELO split up in the mid-Eighties, Lynne produced comeback albums for George Harrison, Tom Petty and Roy Orbison – then pulled all three together, along with Bob Dylan, to form the Traveling Wilburys. "It was marvellous," says Lynne. "I thought, 'I should have been doing this years ago.'" In 2014, Lynne revived ELO for a show at London's Hyde Park before 50,000 fans. The gig went so well he decided to cut a new ELO album, *Alone in the Universe*, and this year ELO will launch a world tour. "It took a lot of rehearsal, since we hadn't played in 28 years," he says. "I had to wait that long before I could really enjoy it again."

#### Showdown 1973

In the late 1960s, I was in a group called the Idle Race, and I got to be pals with this guy called Roy Wood, who was in the Move. We thought it might be nice to have a band with strings in it – back then most groups only had drums and guitar, organ and maybe saxophones and trumpets. The problem with strings, as we discovered, was that there were no pickups on them, which meant doing shows was a real pain in the ass.

After about three months, Roy left to do his own group. I carried on and became the sole producer and the sole writer. I wrote "Showdown" in my mum and dad's front room in Birmingham, England. I knew it was going to be a hit after just a few notes. The lyrics ("She blew in on a southern wind/Now my heart is turned to stone again") are just a made-up scenario. A lot of people ask me what my songs mean, and I have no idea.

### **Evil Woman** 1975

*Face the Music* [ELO's 1975 album] was finished, but I thought, "There's not a good single." So I sent the band out to [watch] a game of football and made up "Evil Woman" on the spot. It was kind of a posh one for me, with all the big piano solos and the string arrangement. It was inspired by a certain woman, but I can't say who. She's appeared a few times in my songs.

### **Mr. Blue Sky** 1977

I suppose this is my most well-known song. Even kids love it, since it's like a nursery rhyme. I wrote the words at a chalet in the mountains of Switzerland. It was misty and cloudy, and I didn't see any countryside for four days. Then everything cleared. There was this enormous view, and the sky was blue.

By this point, ELO was playing stadiums. It was fun, but kind of scary. I was reluctant to become a real rock star. I was shy and was always told to not get a big head. I did have a big house, but I didn't do rock-star things.

### **Don't Bring Me Down**

1979

This one I made up in the studio. When I was singing, there was a gap in the vocals, so I just shouted out, "Groose!" It just came into my head. The engineer said that it meant "greetings" in German, which I thought was lovely, so we left it in. When we played it live, everyone would sing "Bruce." I just ended up singing "Bruce" as well.

This was the first song I ever did without strings. After six albums, I was fed up with them. Part of it was trouble with the unions. The string players would have to stop before a song was finished if the end of the hour was approaching. Now that there are samplers, string players aren't so rude.

### **When We Was Fab** (George Harrison) 1987

I decided to pack it in with ELO in 1986. The concerts were horrible, and I always wanted to be a producer anyway. About six months later, George Harrison asked me to work on his next album. Soon after we met, he said, "Let's go on holiday. I'm going to Australia." He took me to the Grand Prix in Adelaide, which was amazing.

George came up with the words for "When We Was Fab", which we co-wrote. It was supposed to sound like a Beatles song, which was magical for me, since I was a huge Beatles fan.

### **Let It Shine (Brian Wilson)** 1988

After George's album, Warner Bros. asked me to produce Brian Wilson. I was like, "You can't produce Brian Wilson. He's the best producer in the world." But I agreed anyway. We wrote "Let It Shine" at his house in Malibu. He was being treated really badly at the time. I only saw Dr. Landy [Eugene Landy, Wilson's controversial therapist-manager] a couple of times, walking around with his cane and walking stick. You could see what a nice guy Brian was, despite everything happening in the background.

### **Free Fallin' (Tom Petty)** 1989

One day, I saw Tom stopped at a streetlight in Los Angeles. I had met him once before,



#### **FRIENDS IN HIGH PLACES**

Lynne with George Harrison and Eric Clapton at Wembley in 2006.

and he said, "Jeff, pull over." When I did, he said, "I just listened to George's album. What about coming over and writing some tunes together?" "Free Fallin'" was probably the second song we wrote. I got the chords, and we both fleshed out the chorus. Everyone who heard it knew it was a hit.

It was Tom's first solo album, *Full Moon Fever*, and I didn't realise it would be such a big thing for the Heartbreakers, Tom going off on his own. Mike [Campbell] was there, but I played keyboards and bass and told the drummer what to play. The thing is, Tom got a great record out of it. It's still my favourite record that I made with anybody. It's so simple and fresh, and it's got no bullshit.

### **Nobody's Child** (The Traveling Wilburys) 1990

One night, George Harrison and I were recording and he said, "We should form a group." I said, "OK. Who should we have

in it?" He said, "Bob Dylan." I'm going, "Bloody hell." I never expected that answer. And then I said, "Can we have Roy Orbison?" He said, "Great, I love Roy." And we both loved Tom. Everyone we asked joined immediately.

George had some wacky ideas about how the Wilburys could tour. His first was that we'd rent an aircraft carrier and then fly to different ports and let everyone climb onto the aircraft carrier and have a listen. His next idea was to tour by train. We'd pull into a station, drop a stage and play. But we never got around to either of them. Everyone had their own tours to do.

"Nobody's Child" was a charity single to raise money for orphans – it's an old American folk song with a real nice sentiment to it. Later on, we did a second album after Roy died, but I could have done without it. Roy was just too big a part of the group.

### **Free as a Bird** (The Beatles) 1995

George asked me to do this [a "new" Beatles track built around an old John Lennon demo]. It was the hardest thing I've had to do in my life. There was this elation and dread at the same time. I was given a mono one-track tape of John singing the song in 1977. I came to the first session with George, and we were late, which was a bad start. Ringo and Paul were already

there. All four of us sat down at a table, I think the first time they'd all been together for about 20 years. They spent a long time talking about the old days, just reminiscing. I was thrilled to bits.

Some days I thought I was going to get it right, and other days I thought, "What did I get myself into?" One day, I waited until everyone went home, then used a little sampler to insert John's voice into the song wherever I could. It would have been much easier if I had ProTools! The next morning Paul came in and was like, "Jeff, you did it! Well done." He gave me a big hug. It was a relief.

### **When I Was a Boy** 2015

This is the most autobiographical song I've ever written. It's about listening to my little crystal-set radio growing up. It's the first single off the new ELO album, which is doing well in England. We just played *Jimmy Fallon*. I used to dread doing TV appearances, but with monitors now, I can actually hear myself. It's taken me about 40 years to get here, but I've finally caught on.

# Ice Cube

**The actor and MC on joining the Hall of Fame with N.W.A, police brutality then and now, and rapping for David Bowie**

By Simon Vozick-Levinson

LATELY, IT SEEMS LIKE PRETTY MUCH EVERY day is a good day for Ice Cube. In the past six months, he's seen his old group, N.W.A, elected to the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame; watched *Straight Outta Compton*, the movie he co-produced about the groundbreaking gangsta-rap act's late-Eighties rise, rake in a \$200 million payday worldwide; and booked his first-ever spot at Coachella – which will take place just a week after the Hall of Fame induction ceremony in April. "Of all those, making the Hall of Fame has to be the tip-top," says the rapper-actor. "That's a big accomplishment for me, but it's also a big accomplishment for the Hall of Fame to let the world know they're about more than just rock & roll." In the meantime, he's focused on promoting *Ride Along 2*, a sequel to the 2014 buddy comedy with Kevin Hart in which Cube plays an Atlanta detective. "The Oscar-movie phase is over – time to get back to some real fun," he says. "Me and Kevin are the best duo out there."

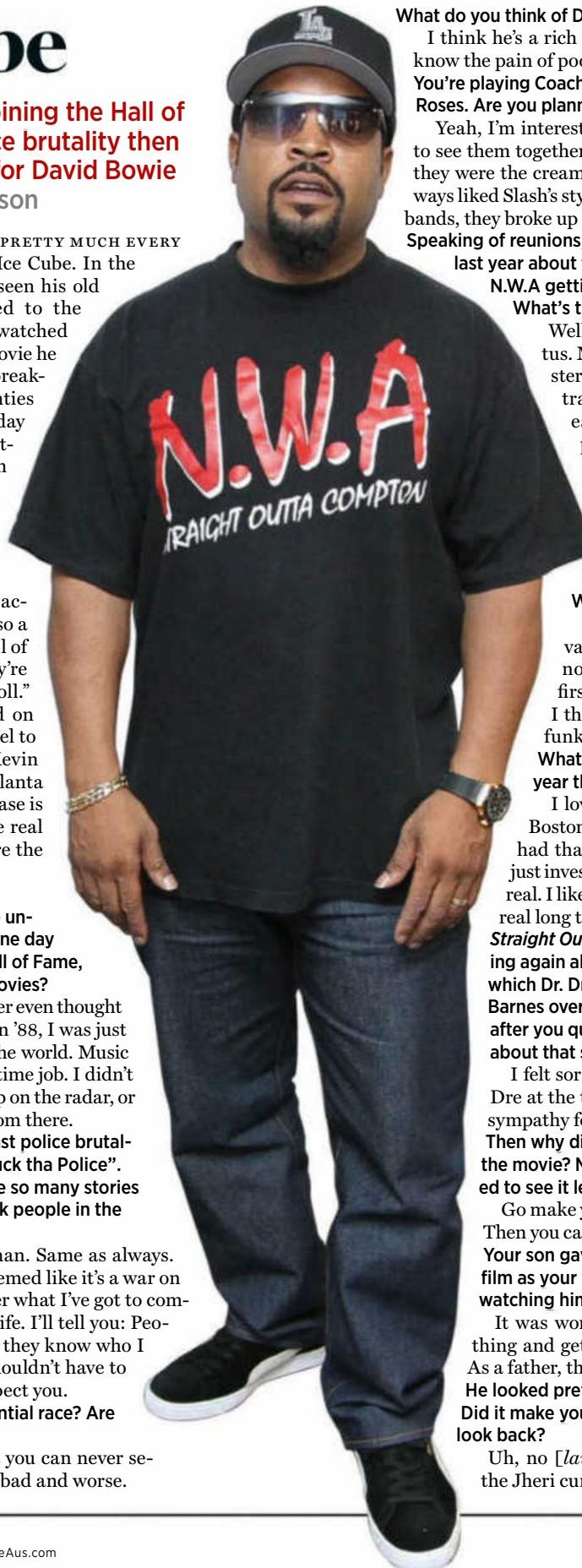
**Which would have seemed more unlikely to you back in 1988: That one day you'd be in the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, or that you'd play a cop in the movies?**

That I'd be playing a cop. I never even thought about doing movies back then. In '88, I was just trying to be the best rapper in the world. Music was a hobby that became a full-time job. I didn't know if we were going to be a blip on the radar, or where my life was going to go from there. **You were a powerful voice against police brutality back then with songs like "Fuck tha Police". How does it make you feel to see so many stories about cops killing unarmed black people in the news all these years later?**

Makes me feel like a black man. Same as always. As a black person, it's always seemed like it's a war on us. It's just terrible. They wonder what I've got to complain about at this point in my life. I'll tell you: People are only nice to me because they know who I am and they like my work. It shouldn't have to be like that to get people to respect you.

**What's your take on the presidential race? Are there any candidates you like?**

Not really. You can elect, but you can never select. It's the difference between bad and worse.



**What do you think of Donald Trump?**

I think he's a rich white man. He can't possibly know the pain of poor people.

**You're playing Coachella the same night as Guns n' Roses. Are you planning to watch their set?**

Yeah, I'm interested to see how that goes. Just to see them together again will be cool. I thought they were the cream of the crop back then – I always liked Slash's style. And then, like a lot of good bands, they broke up too soon.

**Speaking of reunions, there were some rumours last year about the surviving members of N.W.A getting together for a new tour. What's the status on that?**

Well, I don't really know the status. Making the movie was a monster, and we had to really concentrate on that. Some things are easier said than done. I hope people will see us out on that stage together soon, but it's really up to Dre and Ren and Yella.

**You worked on a remix of David Bowie's "I'm Afraid of Americans" in 1997.**

**Was that a big deal for you?**

It was. He was such an innovator, and his songs were phenomenal. I remember when I first heard "Fame" on the radio, I thought he was black. It was so funky!

**What was your favourite movie last year that you weren't involved in?**

I love *Spotlight* – the story about Boston politics was well-told, and it had that *All the President's Men* feel, just investigating what's going on. It felt real. I liked *The Revenant*, too, but it felt real long to me.

***Straight Outta Compton* got people talking again about the 1991 incident in which Dr. Dre assaulted journalist Dee Barnes over an interview she did with you after you quit N.W.A. What did you think about that situation at the time?**

I felt sorry for Dee. And I was mad at Dre at the time – I didn't have too much sympathy for him.

**Then why didn't that incident make it into the movie? Many people were disappointed to see it left out.**

Go make your own movie about N.W.A. Then you can put in anything you want to. Your son gave a great performance in the film as your younger self. What was it like watching him in that role?

It was wonderful to see my son do his thing and get busy. I knew he could do it. As a father, that's what I get off on.

**He looked pretty cool in your old Jheri curl. Did it make you think about bringing that look back?**

Uh, no [laughs]. I'll let you bring back the Jheri curl.



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Vagrant



# DMA's Reach 'Hills End'

**Sydney trio put the hype behind them to release debut full-length**

By Dan Lander

**I**T'S A LATE JANUARY AFTERNOON and there's a storm brewing over Sydney; one of those fuck-everything-in-its-path storms that springs from nowhere to mock a morning that was all clear skies and sunshine. As a huge peal of thunder rolls over the city, DMA's guitarist and songwriter Matt Mason looks across the empty top-floor bar of a laid-back inner-Sydney hotel and says, "I forgot to shut my window, man – I am fucked."

As the big rain begins to fall and everyone turns back to their drinks, it's obvious that Mason and mates Tommy O'Dell and Johnny Took are not what you'd expect from a band that has been tagged, since day one, as "hype". After their debut EP landed just outside iTunes' Top Ten in 2014, the trio have weathered a storm every bit as chaotic as the one rattling the pub's windows. From overnight sensations scoring record deals around the world to jibes from Noel Gallagher to the gruelling reality of long international tours, O'Dell, Took and Mason have already endured all manner of bastardy – long before releasing their first album.

"Sure, we've had some stuff said," shrugs Mason. "Like I read that someone thought we were just put together by a record label!"

"I take that as a compliment," laughs Took.

"Yeah, but they could have found better looking dudes," points out O'Dell. "What, was the record company guy blind?"

It's not quite water off a duck's back, but for the trio it's also all [Cont. on 24]

**THREE'S A BAND**  
Matt Mason, Tommy O'Dell and Johnny Took (from left)





DANIEL BOUD

## DMA'S

[Cont. from 22] part of the job. And on the eve of the release of that long awaited first album, *Hills End*, three good friends with their feet firmly on the ground are able to keep the whole thing in perspective.

"Before we had much stuff out, people could either talk about [first single] 'Delete', or they could talk about how we dress or how we sound like Oasis or how they hate us," states Mason. "But now there's a lot more stuff to talk about, so they don't have to make all that shit up anymore."

Unlike the band's explosive start - which all three guys admit was pretty incredible - the "stuff" that's happened since "Delete" turned heads across the globe hasn't been instant or glamorous. It's been hard graft.

"We've been touring the EP all around the world," explains O'Dell. "Laying the ground work... It's been hard but fun, but still working, working hard. And it's pretty unglamorous. I've had to share a bed with our tour manager for pretty much the whole of the last tour, four months. That's pretty heavy."

Like almost all overnight sensations, Took, O'Dell and Mason have been banging their heads against the proverbial wall since their teens. Three Sydney natives - Took grew up in Ashfield, O'Dell in Balgowlah and Mason in Bondi - they have been in countless bands, with and without each other. Among other things, Took and Mason have a history together in a bluegrass outfit; O'Dell and Took toured relentlessly together in a psych-rock band; Mason even still fronts another band, which has been put on hiatus while DMA's take priority.

In short, the success the trio found together didn't just fall into their lap - but it did come in a different fashion. "Maybe we'd thought in the back of our minds that we'd like to bypass some of the channels that we'd already struggled with in the past," admits O'Dell. "Like driving to Melbourne 20 times a year and playing to one person."

With a smile, Took agrees. "One time we went to Ballarat with the psych band Tommy and I were in and we actually played a really good show, but we literally played in front of the bartender, the sound guy and the door chick."

Without becoming too disheartened by, or disenchanted with, that traditional approach, Mason, O'Dell and Took fell - almost accidentally - into another way of doing things when they started the project that would eventually become DMA's.

"It was just the three of us, and we were all playing in other bands and getting that live fix, so we were happy with just recording," says O'Dell. With no preconceptions, the project could grow organically: Mason

and Took began writing and producing, and O'Dell - previously a drummer - unexpectedly fell into the role of vocalist.

"We were doing a lot of demoing at Johnny's house," recalls Mason, "and Tommy would be working, painting, during the day. We'd do demos, and me and Johnny would sing on the demo so we could just get everything in place and be working on it all day saying, 'Fuck, I can't wait until Tommy finishes work!'"

"And then he'd get there," continues Took, "and have a shower and get all the paint off his hands, and come and sing and suddenly it would be like the songs went from a four to an eight, instantly."

While it wasn't something he'd ever considered a goal in life, O'Dell quickly settled into the singer slot. "I never found it that

would leave and others would join and so we figured it was better to keep the three of us the core of it, because people were coming and going all the time."

Far from seeing that revolving door as a problem, DMA's view their fluid band as a blessing. A little like Bob Dylan has been able to work with everyone from Mike Bloomfield to Robbie Robertson, Mark Knopfler and Charlie Sexton, DMA's have found that not insisting on a stable band has meant they can entice the best players around to get involved, even if only short-term.

"If you want the best musicians that you know to play with you," says Mason, "if they're really good, the best, then they're also going to want to do their own thing, so they'll do just one tour and then they'll



## BEEN AROUND THE WORLD

Onstage in Boston last year. "It's been hard but fun," says O'Dell (centre) of the touring.

hard going from drumming to singing," he says matter-of-factly. "And I'm not being a wanker about that - I just didn't find the transition that hectic. I actually find singing easier than drumming. Learning how to use a mic live, that was probably the biggest thing, but once you get used to having your voice blaring back at you, it's OK."

O'Dell wasn't the only one who had to figure out the band's live format. As an outfit with no intentions beyond recording at home, the first hints of success also brought with them the unexpected challenge of moving from the lounge room to the stage. Online attention led to a record offer from hip Sydney indie label I Oh You, but first the trio had to prove they could make their virtual sounds a reality.

"We formed a band of people around the area," explains Mason, "but members

fuck off. You can't blame them when they say, 'I gotta go'."

Now, after more than a year working venues all over the world with those "best musicians", DMA's are ready for the next chapter. For the trio, their debut long player, *Hills End*, is a turning point. Recorded at home, DIY, much like their EP, the difference with the album is that it was refined by Spike Stent - a heavyweight mixer who has worked with "everyone from Depeche Mode to the Spice Girls", as Took puts it. It's the same combination of "big melodies and noisy guitars" - Took's words again - but this time it's something more: a chance to be, rather than just potentially be.

Still, they're not getting ahead of themselves. "It started quickly, but since then it's been growing slowly, organically," Took concludes. "And well, the record hasn't even come out yet, and people are only just discovering the band now, so there's still a lot more to do."

# MiiKE SN!!!W



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# A FAN'S NOTES

BY HENRY ROLLINS

Our man in the van is returning to Australia for the AMP Awards

I HAVE BEEN ASKED TO SPEAK AT the 2016 AMP. I happily accepted. The reasons for this are multi-fold. It doesn't take much to get me to visit Australia. I think it is a perfect patch of territory. Also, hopefully, I will have the chance to thank Australians for Australian music, which makes up a lot of my listening and what I put into my radio shows. Sometimes, I have to assure the listeners that I am not secretly Australian as I play so much music from there. And hopefully, I will be able to hit some record stores and bring back some more amazing music.

You, being Australian, might not think of your music scene and how it rates with others out there. Allow me to bring you the great news that for decades, the output has been amazing and almost freakishly prolific/consistent. I tell people that I think that every third person in Australia is in a band and they're all good.

It was in the late 1980s when I made my first trip to Australia and got a clue as to the music-rich environment. I came back to America with all the records I could afford. It's been a plague ever since, and what makes it even cooler is that, in my opinion at least, it's getting even better. I have the wonderful problem of trying to keep up.

For years, I have wondered what it is that makes this country such a jam out powerhouse. I have a theory, drenched

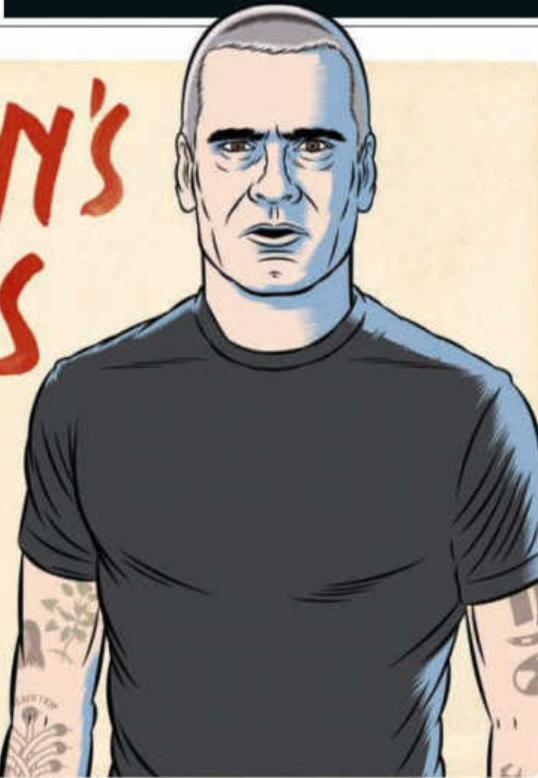
**"Australia has an incredible, living, breathing scene that is innovative and unique."**

in romance, that's probably way off but maybe not. I think that the sheer distance from other populated land masses, with all their noisy pop culture preciousness, fads, booms and busts, might allow Australian artists to just get on with things. If an influence gets to Australia, by the time it washes up on shore, it is an abstract legend, handed down from a long departed race. I imagine an Australian youth finding the Robert Johnson recordings in a used shop, taking them home, listening and getting something from the music that someone sharing a country with hundreds of millions of other people, and their cars, guns, noise, etc., would simply be unable to. It's a little misty-eyed I know, but I think

I'm onto something.

I am not afforded the space to list all the bands that I am thinking of as I write this as it would take up several hundred words. It's a case of if I wrote about one, I would have to mention all the others as well.

You have an incredible, living, breathing scene that is innovative, smart and unique. To sustain this phenomenal occurrence requires you to act. I can't tell you what to do of course but I can strongly recommend that you buy a turntable so you can play real records and visit your local vinyl dealer as frequently as time and budget allow. You have got it so good there. Can't wait to be back.



## Rick Nielsen

### FIVE SONGS I WISH I'D WRITTEN

With Cheap Trick elected to the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, we asked the band's guitarist to talk songwriting.

#### The Nazz

##### "Open My Eyes"

A great early power-pop song – not too syrupy, kind of noisy. It's like a bugle waking you up. Later on, it inspired me to write "Hello There".

#### The Raspberries

##### "Go All the Way"

All the parts fit: There's not too much bridge, and the chorus doesn't repeat too many times. It's exciting.

#### Dave Clark 5

##### "Glad All Over"

Today the drum parts would be toned down – they're too loud. But why? They're a signature part of the song.

#### Small Faces

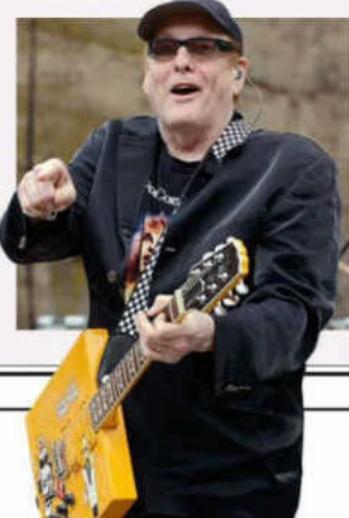
##### "Whatcha Gonna Do About It?"

So simple that it probably wouldn't make sense if anyone else did it – but there's Steve Marriott wailing, and the guy is just so convincing.

#### Oasis

##### "The Shock of the Lightning"

The riff goes on and on, and Liam Gallagher just snarls. We play this song at our shows before we go onstage. It puts me in the mood to rock.





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**A STAR IS BORN**

Buckley in 1994.  
"[He] really had  
the potential for  
greatness," says  
Steve Berkowitz.



FROM THE VAULT

# Jeff Buckley's Intimate Demos

**Singer-songwriter covers Dylan, the Smiths and more on recently unearthed demos**  
By Rod Yates

**W**HEN STEVE BERKOWITZ saw Jeff Buckley performing at Sin-é cafe in New York's East Village in early 1992, he knew this was the moment he'd been waiting for all his working life. "I used to play and sing in a band," he starts, "but at one point I thought, 'OK, I'm not all that.' My goal in life was to work with musicians who are great or hold the potential for greatness. And Jeff Buckley, well, this guy really had the potential for greatness."

Today Berkowitz is, amongst other things, a Grammy-winning producer, but in 1992 he was working in A&R at Columbia Records when he strolled into Sin-é. "There were four or five people, and a guy in a T-shirt in the corner playing a Telecaster," he says. "And that was Jeff Buckley. From the moment I heard two songs I went, 'Wow, this guy is unbelievable!'"

The two became friends, and by November '92 Buckley was signing with Berkowitz to record and release what would become his debut album, *Grace*. At that point, though, not even the artist had any idea how that record would sound.

"One of the complications of being Jeff Buckley is that you're so talented, and he could do so many different things, and now you're faced with the idea of, I'm supposed to make a first record, and you only get to make a first record once: who am I? What am I?" explains Berkowitz.

"My job was to keep the record company away from him, to keep people away, so he could go through this and discover what record it was he did want to make."

To facilitate the process, Berkowitz booked a low-key session in New York's Shelter Island Sound studio the following February with producer Steve Addabbo (Suzanne Vega, Shawn Colvin), the aim being to let Buckley record "whatever he feels like recording... and maybe through these recordings a couple of things would step out and say, 'OK, let's put these on an album.'"

The results of that three-day session can be heard on *You and I*, the latest posthumous release to surface since Buckley's death in 1997. Exhumed from the Sony vaults and overseen by Buckley's mother, Mary Guibert, and Legacy Recordings' Darren Salmieri, the 10-song album was recorded straight to DAT. It features two originals (an early version of "Grace" and a sketch of a song called "Dream of You and I", featuring a preamble from the singer as he explains the inspiration behind it) and a slew of covers such as Bob Dylan's "Just Like a Woman" and Led Zeppelin's "Night Flight". While "Just Like a Woman" and the Smiths' "I Know It's Over" were recorded in Bearsville Studios later in 1993 during the *Grace* sessions, the rest were captured at Shelter Island, just Buckley and his guitar.

"The first day we go in," recalls Berkowitz, "Jeff's got some trepidation about where he is, and even says on the very first take, 'Can I hear my voice? I'm kind of a little nervous.' This is a guy who's very aware of himself and his surroundings, and now he's signed to Columbia Records and, 'Wow, I'm recording for "The Man" today.'"

Berkowitz sat with Buckley as he ran through some covers, helping him get comfortable. At one point he asked the singer if he knew any Sly & the Family Stone, upon which Buckley started tapping his foot and playing the opening chords of "Everyday People". On the third take (which features on *You and I*), "he closed his eyes and opened his chest up, and when he gets to the [chorus] he really let it fly. And I said to myself, time for me to leave the room. The ice had been broken. He felt no threat here, he was happy singing."

As for whether Buckley would approve of posthumous albums such as *You and I*, Berkowitz waves the question away: "If I thought it wasn't good I would say so and I wouldn't be talking to you now." Admitting that "I still don't do well with the fact he's not here", Berkowitz recalls the moment he heard these demos recently, for the first time in a decade. "It felt great, it felt bittersweet, it felt sad, but it's what we've got. We've lost a guy but we haven't lost this, and we haven't lost the music and we haven't lost the feeling that he brought when he did it. I wish you and I were talking about album number nine, but I'm happy [this is] coming out."



Berkowitz

# The Secret History of Seventies Rock



**THAT '70S SHOW**  
Cannavale on the set of *Vinyl*

**With 'Vinyl', Martin Scorsese and Mick Jagger take a deep dive into the underbelly of the decade's music biz**  
By Rob Sheffield

**W**EELCOME TO NEW YORK, 1973: The spirit of rock & roll is a cesspool of money, drugs and bodily fluids. *Vinyl* is the excellent and hotly awaited new HBO tale of the Seventies music business, executive-produced by the glimmer twins of Martin Scorsese and Mick Jagger, along with *The Sopranos'* Terence Winter. The mobbed-up record labels are trying to squeeze every last drop of blood they can get from what's left of the Sixties. On the

streets, punk and hip-hop are just starting to fester. Up in the boardrooms, it's business as usual – a promo hustler drops by to visit his favourite radio DJ, giving him the hundred-dollar handshake, except by now the payola nut is up to five grand and a gram. The promo man and the DJ snort a few lines of "Bolivian dancing dust" off the record on the turntable, while Chicago's "Saturday in the Park" plays. That perky little hit has never sounded so sordid. Can you dig it?

*Vinyl* gives the Seventies New York rock scene the *Goodfella*s treatment. Bobby Cannavale stars as the Henry Hill figure: Richie Finestra, head honcho of struggling Ameri-

can Century Records and a veteran of the label wars of the early Sixties. As he recalls, "When I started in this business, rock & roll was defined like this: two Jews

and a guinea recording four schvartzes on a single track. Now it's changed so much it's not even recognisable as the thing people used to be afraid of."

He's a racket boy who worked his way up in the New York clubs, bragging, "You think you work hard? Try scraping Chubby Checker's vomit off the inside of a toilet stall." But now his label is falling apart; nobody knows what's going to hit big next. He wants to sell out to Polygram, but first he needs to sign some heavy hitters, so

**'Vinyl' has a great sense of American sleaze – it revels in the details of how money gets cranked from the music machine.**

he has his people scrounging around for the almost-famous. James Jagger, Mick's 30-year-old son, is priceless as the singer for the up-and-coming proto-punks the Nasty Bits. Meanwhile, Finestra's partying takes a toll on his marriage to Olivia Wilde, a former Factory model turned into a bored suburban housewife. She meets a Nico-style scenester at a party, who coos, "Andy asked for you just the other night! Lou was with us."

*Vinyl* uses the gritty details of Seventies rock culture to tell the story, like the moment when a room of jaded label hacks sit around listening to a record from this weird new pop group from Sweden named Abba. ("The music's garbage, but I'd fuck the blonde." "Can you beg in Swedish?") A cardboard cutout of Rod Stewart in the corner looks on sadly, as if he wishes he could warn them the future will be like nothing they imagined.

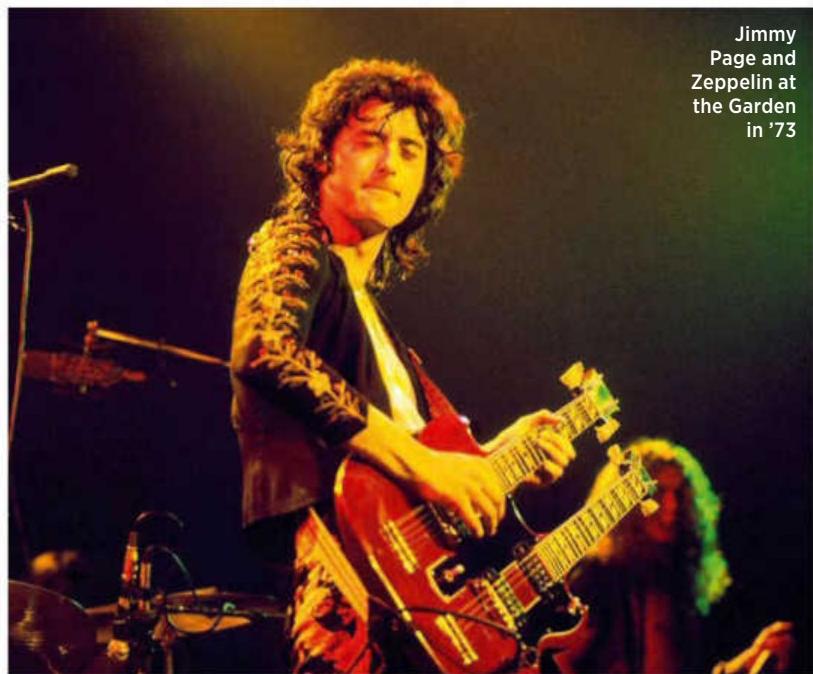
The show has a great sense of American sleaze – the Scorsese-directed premiere episode revels in the petty criminal details of how nickels and dimes get cranked out of the old-school music machine, whether that means dumping cutouts or kneecapping artists who get out of line.

Passionate music fans rub elbows with gangsters and killers – yet sometimes they're the same people. The weak spots come when actors try to impersonate real-life rock stars, as in the clumsy scenes where Cannavale argues with Led Zeppelin. The guy playing Robert Plant looks more like Dave Mustaine after raiding Dee Snider's wig vault, and Zeppelin manager Peter Grant, legendary as a terrifying hulk of brute force, is portrayed as looking more like a crankier Phil Collins.

1973 was also the year Scorsese dropped *Mean Streets*, the film that made his bones as a director and changed all the rules of Seventies cinema, especially in the way it used rock & roll to tell the story. *Mean Streets* was also the movie that fused the genius of both Scorsese and Jagger, with the Stones on the soundtrack – the classic scene where Robert De Niro glowers in the club to "Jumpin' Jack Flash".

So this is a shady world Scorsese and Jagger know well. In one fantastic nightmare sequence, Cannavale scores blow downtown, then goes to the Mercer Arts Center to see the New York Dolls play "Personality Crisis", as the violence of the music and the madness of the fans make him sweat his brains out through his leather jacket. It's a perfect soundtrack to the personality crisis that's going on in his soul – and also for the state of rock & roll. Paint it black, baby.

For an extended interview with Bobby Cannavale go to page 78.



Jimmy Page and Zeppelin at the Garden in '73

## The Annotated 'Vinyl'

The show mixes fiction with true rock history. A guide to its real-life references

### Led Zeppelin at Madison Square Garden, 1973

**TV VERSION** In the show's pilot, set in 1973, Richie Finestra (Bobby Cannavale) visits Robert Plant at the Garden to talk him into signing with his label. Later, we see cameras filming as the band blasts through "Somethin' Else".

**REAL STORY** Zep played three sold-out shows at the Garden in July 1973, shot for the concert doc *The Song Remains the Same*.

### 'Maury Gold'

**TV VERSION** Finestra's first boss, seen in flashbacks, is a label owner with ties to thugs with Italian surnames.

**REAL STORY** The character is likely based on Morris Levy, the notorious boss of Roulette Records. Levy had links to the Genovese crime family and allegedly terrified and swindled Tommy James.



David Johansen

### Mercer Arts Center

**TV VERSION** Finestra watches as the New York Dolls rock the Mercer so hard it literally collapses.

**REAL STORY** The building that housed Mercer crumbled on August 3rd, 1973. The Dolls, who often played the venue, weren't there.

### Velvet Underground at the Dom, 1966

**TV VERSION** In a flashback, Richie meets his future wife at a venue resembling the East Village club as the VU play "Venus in Furs".

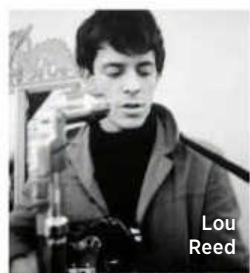
**REAL STORY** The Velvets' '66 residency at the Dom marked Nico's first performances with the band.



### Kool Herc and the birth of hip-hop

**TV VERSION** One evening, Finestra's limo passes an apartment building – number 1520 – from which funky, jump-cut DJ music is blasting.

**REAL STORY** On August 11th, 1973, Clive "Kool Herc" Campbell DJ'd hard-funk records in the rec room of 1520 Sedgwick Avenue in the Bronx, a party generally credited to be the first hip-hop jam.



Lou Reed

# Hinds: Late Nights, Loud Guitars

**How the best band in Madrid went from covering Bob Dylan on the beach to selling out clubs in America**

“ONE SECOND – I’M GOING TO grab a beer so I’ll feel relaxed and tell you our secrets,” Ana García Perrote says with a laugh. The 21-year-old singer-guitarist is backstage at a theatre in Lille, France, killing time before she hits the stage with the Madrid-based quartet Hinds. Their shows are ridiculously fun garage-rock rave-ups – much like their debut LP, *Leave Me Alone* – and lately the crowds have been wilder than ever, which is just how Hinds like it. “Our audiences used to be more shy,” Perrote says after finding a drink. “But now people know that if you go to a Hinds show, you can dance as much as you want and feel free for an hour.”

Hinds began in the summer of 2011, when Perrote and singer-guitarist Carlotta Cosials, who met through an ex-boyfriend, brought a couple of acoustic guitars along on a vacation to Spain’s Mediterranean coast. “I didn’t know how to play,” says Cosials, 24, “but Ana taught me the three chords that she knew.” They ended up sitting on the beach, strumming Bob Dylan’s “It Ain’t Me, Babe”, and trying to memorise the knotty lyrics. “We got really obsessed,” Perrote says. “We had tan lines from where the guitars cast shadows on our bodies.” Next, they tried busking their Dylan cover and a few other songs by the shore; it was good enough to bring in 30 euros. “We were so happy that we could



**SPANISH BOMBS**  
Martin, Cosials, Grimbergen and Perrote (from left) in Brooklyn, October

pay for the gas to Madrid and back!” says Perrote.

The duo’s musical career quieted down shortly after that, only to roar back in 2014, when they rounded out their lineup with bassist Ade Martin, 23, and drummer Amber Grimbergen, 19. A few buzzy singles later (and a name change from Deers to Hinds after the threat of legal action), they were selling out club shows in the U.K. and Germany.

Hinds’ members are especially fond of playing the States, where they just fin-

ished a monthlong tour and will return in March. “The wildness of Americans really turns us on,” Cosials says. “People really give themselves to the music. In Europe, people don’t go that crazy.” They’re still talking about the house party they played in one Kansas City fan’s basement after rocking a local theatre in October. “It was exactly how Europeans imagine American parties,” Perrote says. “Everyone was making out with each other. This is the best work ever, seriously.”

SIMON VOZICK-LEVINSON



Can's  
Jaki  
Liebezeit,  
1975

## INSIDE THE KRAUTROCK REVOLUTION

### A history of a freaky, hugely influential Seventies music scene

A pivotal influence on hip-hop, EDM and synth-pop, not to mention David Bowie and Brian Eno, the mysterious Sixties and Seventies German music dubbed krautrock has mainly remained a hipster reference point in Australia. British music writer David Stubbs may change that with *Future Days: Krautrock and the Birth of a*

*Revolutionary New Music*. The hefty volume maps a freaky but fierce scene defined by radical beats and futuristic electronic soundscapes – a musical attempt at nothing less than a complete “re-establishment of cultural identity” after the horrors of World War II.

Among the book’s stars are Kraftwerk, the only band of the era to break through internationally (inspiring hip-hop pioneer Afrika Bambaataa, among others), and Can,

art-funk adventurers committed to collective improvisation (“No one was allowed to become Führer!” the band’s beat mastermind Jaki Liebezeit stresses).

Stubbs was especially surprised to find that even in its homeland, krautrock remains a secret history. “It was remarkable to walk around Cologne with [Liebezeit] – no one recognises him,” says the author. “They should erect a statue of the man.”

WILL HERMES



# Grand Designs

They say there's nothing new under the sun, but Yamaha and Sennheiser are putting that to the test with these new conceptual designs **By Matt Coyte**



**CAFE RACER STYLING**  
The subtle nods to Japanese cafe racer motorcycle styling are tasteful, and never gimmicky.

## The New Classic

**Yamaha REVSTAR Series**

From \$836

These days, guitar design seems to revolve either around rehashing tired shapes and technology, or gimmicky tomfoolery that never runs the risk of becoming classic. Hats off to Yamaha for attempting to create a new classic from the ground up. Every element of their new REVSTAR line is well thought-out – from the ergonomic scalloped back to the comforting heft of the body and the butter-smooth tuners, these guitars argue the case for their inclusion in the quiver of any professional guitarist. The vintage output humbuckers on the RS820CR and the P-90s on the RS502 have a colour and bite that you rarely find in modern pickups, making this a guitar that is built for you to create your signature sound around. Guitarists inspired by Josh Homme or Dan Auerbach will wrestle a huge sound from these instruments, while shredders might find the neck radius a little on the batty side. The 502 and the 820CR that we played were hard to fault, with every component feeling lovingly hand-crafted and with mahogany bodies made to sing, with only the pickups on the entry-level

RS420 feeling a little dull. For their price, these REVSTAR guitars are hard to beat.

## The Pinnacle of Personal Audio

**Sennheiser HE 1060**

From \$75,000

Sennheiser's HE 1060 headphones are definitely not for the casual music-lover. For the price of two family cars, you can experience the result of almost 10 years' of research and development by the famed German headphone company. Charged with simply creat-

ing "the best headphones in the world", the boffins at Sennheiser haven't cut any corners, from the carrara marble-housed valve amplifier to the thick-as-a baby's-arm cable, this is an imposing piece of kit that would look at home in the palace of a Saudi Prince. Of course, it sounds like nothing we have, or probably ever will experience, with an insane dynamic range and spacial impact. Is it worth \$75K? Sure – if you're a millionaire it is.





ON TOUR

**BACK TO WORK**  
Springsteen kicks off  
the *River* Tour 2016.

# How Springsteen Got Back to 'The River' and Hit the Road

**Behind the scenes as the E Streeters launch their first tour in nearly two years. Plus: His plans for his next album**  
By David Fricke

**M**OOD LIGHTING – WE need mood lighting,” Bruce Springsteen says from the stage at the Consol Energy Center in Pittsburgh. Then he turns to his left and shouts, “Professor!” – the singer’s nickname for E Street Band pianist Roy Bittan, who begins his long signature introduction to the ballad “Point Blank” from Springsteen’s 1980 double album, *The River*. As the rest of the E Street Band takes up the song’s walking-

wounded rhythm, Springsteen is aptly lit at his mic, half in shadow, like a New Jersey-boardwalk Sinatra in a T-shirt, jeans and loosely laced work boots.

It is the start of Springsteen’s final rehearsal before he and the E Street Band open a 24-date tour here the following night. The concerts, their first in almost two years, will feature complete performances of *The River* with what Springsteen calls a “set after the set” of hits. The January 16th show in Pittsburgh will place a high bar for the gigs to follow: 34 songs over nearly three and a half hours, including a memorial cover of David Bowie’s “Rebel Rebel”.

But at this practice session – which is a show in itself, running for close to three hours – Springsteen is drilling his band through sides three and four of *The River*,

yelling cues and calling out missteps. “By myself,” he orders during a jubilant “Cadillac Ranch”, reminding guitarists Steven Van Zandt and Nils Lofgren, violinist Soozie Tyrell and singer Patti Scialfa, Springsteen’s wife, to hold their backing vocals in one chorus. After a moving finale of “Drive All Night” and “Wreck on the Highway”, Springsteen calls the four to a huddle next to Max Weinberg’s drum riser to refine the harmonies in “The Price You Pay”, their voices quietly ringing in the empty arena, without a mic, like private prayer.

“We spent everything we had, literally, to make that record,” Springsteen says of *The River*, his fifth studio release and first Number One album, in his backstage dressing room after rehearsal. Released in October 1980, *The River* was the product

of nearly two years of writing, recording sessions and last-minute changes, including the retraction of an early single-disc sequence. "When the record came out, we were down to peanuts," Springsteen goes on. "But I wanted it to have scope, to appeal to the different parts of what we did. I wanted it to be fun. I wanted it to be crushing." He and the E Street Band accumulated enough material for four albums: the 20 songs on *The River*, and more than two dozen outtakes included in the new, lavish audio-visual box set, *The Ties That Bind: The River Collection*.

Springsteen characterises his earlier albums as "outsider records. I was part of a marginal community at the Shore. The records were an imagined version of that outsider's scene." *The River*, he contends, "was the first insider record, where the character is meditating on those elements – marriage, work, love, faith, death – that you have in common with everyone else."

"You're asking people to retrace some miles with you from 35 summers ago," Springsteen says of the current tour, noting that he's played *The River* in its entirety only once before, at New York's Madison Square Garden in November 2009. He warns that the album is "not gonna say the same things now that it said at the time. It's gonna say that – and something else. I have an idea what it's gonna be, but" – he leans forward for emphasis, grinning – "I'm anxious to feel it."

It is a recent hunger. Until November, Springsteen had no plans to tour with the E Street Band in 2016. Last summer, the singer completed a new solo album that he had started almost four years ago, prior to 2012's *Wrecking Ball*. "I was probably gonna go out and perform it on my own," Springsteen says. But in November, as he and manager Jon Landau discussed promotion for *The Ties That Bind*, Landau suggested that Springsteen and the E Street Band perform *The River* at a couple of small-hall shows in New York and Los Angeles.

"Bruce said, 'It takes as much time to rehearse for two shows as it does for 20. Why don't we do 20?'" Landau recalls. "I fell out of my chair." Weinberg says he got the call about the tour after Thanksgiving. Concert dates were announced the next week.

Weinberg says he was "absolutely delighted" to hit the road. "In all of my pro-

fessional engagements, I have what I call the Springsteen Clause. It's inviolate. It's my own version of *force majeure*. It's an act of God or Bruce Springsteen. And it works all the time."

Springsteen dropped the horn section and vocal choir that illuminated his 2013-14 concerts with the E Street Band. "I knew the basis of the show was going to be *The River*, and that was a small rock group," he says. The tighter lineup "feels much more like the old days". Indeed, of the 10 musicians who take the stage in

*Edge of Town*. Several songs cut for *The River* – including "Point Blank", the party grenade "Sherry Darling" and the poignant father-son conversation "Independence Day" – were written for the previous album. "I've always read that Bruce is a perfectionist," Weinberg says over a cocktail at the band's hotel after rehearsal. "But it was more like, 'You keep writing until you get what makes sense.'"

The drummer remembers getting a call from Springsteen at 9 a.m. one day, asking him to come to the singer's house to work on a song that he had written overnight.

Later that day, Weinberg says, the entire band was in the studio cutting that tune, "Roulette". It was the first song the band recorded for *The River* – and it was eventually left off the album, along with other deep-fan favourites such as "Loose Ends" and "Be True".

Van Zandt, who co-produced *The River*, estimates that Springsteen wrote 100 songs circa *Darkness* and *The River*. "He was getting 10, 12 songs very quickly," the guitarist says over lunch the day of the Pittsburgh

show, "and I'd be like, 'OK, let's put that out. You want to do 12 more? That's the next album.'

"But he thinks about this stuff so deeply, so comprehensively," Van Zandt continues. "He just had a thing: 'I'm doing it my way, the way I feel.' That continues to this day. He's his own genre."

"I don't know," Springsteen says cautiously when asked if he will extend *The River* Tour 2016 beyond the closing dates so far, March 15th and 17th in Los Angeles. "We'll have to see how everybody feels, how the show feels." Springsteen also declines to reveal details about the new solo album. Van Zandt, who has heard it, says it's "very good" with "real nice things on it, nice orchestrations". And Landau confirms that "it will be the next thing we release. It's something Bruce wants to stand behind."

For now, Springsteen is on what he calls "writing hiatus", concentrating on the live resurrection of his turning-point songs on *The River*. "If you wrote them well, they sustain," he says. "Not only do they sustain, they grow and find their current context. That's what I'm hoping for on this tour, that the music finds its life in the here and now. That would be wonderful," Springsteen adds with a hopeful smile. "I'd go home a happy player."



**"We stand toe-to-toe with any version of our band that's been out there. The shared history you have with people makes the night beautiful."**

Pittsburgh, five – Springsteen, Van Zandt, Weinberg, Bittan and bassist Garry Tallent – were on *The River*, while keyboard player Charlie Giordano and saxophonist Jake Clemons fire up the parts originally played by late E Street members Danny Federici and Clarence Clemons, Jake's uncle.

"You're competing with people's memories of what we've done," Springsteen admits, acknowledging the legendary status of the 1980-'81 shows he played behind *The River* – two-set marathons with the E Street Band that often ran up to four hours a night. "I don't have a problem with that. We stand toe-to-toe with any version of our band that's been out there. And that shared history you have with people makes the night very full, very beautiful."

Springsteen was on the verge of turning 30 when he began recording *The River* at the Power Station in New York in March 1979. He was also in the middle of a furious, searching torrent of songwriting that had spilled over from *Darkness on the*



BODY IN A BOX  
Dallas Green: not a fan of funerals.

# Dallas Green

Touring this month for Bluesfest, the man known as City and Colour is a child of the Nineties By Matt Coyte

## The Song That Reminds Me of Growing Up

**Alice In Chains** "Them Bones", 1992



"I was 11 or so years old, so I guess I was already kind of grown up, but to me that's the period of music in the Nineties that sealed the deal for me as far as being emotionally attached to music. I liked a lot of music from this period, Pearl Jam, Nirvana, but I chose this song just because I've always really liked it and it takes me back to that time."

## The First Song I Learned To Play

**Pearl Jam** "Alive", 1991



"I want to say it's either 'Alive' or 'Even Flow' by Pearl Jam. I can't remember which order though. When *Ten* came out it was '91. I'm 11 or 12 years old and I had been playing guitar for probably four or five years at that point. I had started to develop an ear, and that's when my guitar teacher showed me how to listen. I would bring a cassette and he would listen to it and write the tablature out for me. The first thing I brought in for him was Pearl Jam *Ten* and we started learning the songs. So 'Alive' was the first song I learned by somebody else."

## The Song I'm Most Proud Of

**City and Colour** "Hope For Now", 2011



"It's the last song on *Little Hell*. I really like that song because on the recording I play everything. I always wanted to play drums on a song, because I'm not that good of a drummer but I have a secret fantasy to play the drums, just like a lot of front men. But on that one I had an idea of what I wanted that song to be, this sort of slow build into this crescendo. And now when we play that live it's one of my favourite ones to do."

## The Song That's Guaranteed To Get Me on the Dancefloor

**Craig Mack** "Flava In Ya Ear", 1994



"We have a pretty rad playlist that we play in the dressing room that's mostly Nineties hip-hop and R&B. [This is] Craig Mack's one big song. That to me is the best hip-hop beat of all time. Even when it comes on every night on my playlist I freak out, because I just fucking love it."

## The Song I Play Air Guitar To

**Pantera** "I'm Broken", 1994



"It's a similar thing to 'Alive' [sings guitar line]. That and 'Five Minutes Alone' off that same Pantera album. I used to love the video. It had a close up of Dimebag's guitar strings and there was a cool bit where he hits the whammy bar and the string goes 'brrrrrr'."

**“I've always wanted to be the Mary J. Blige to someone's Method Man.”**

## The Song I Never Want to Hear Again

**Gloria Estefan & Miami Sound Machine** "Conga", 1985



"When I was younger my mum used to listen to Gloria Estefan & Miami Sound Machine, and I don't really think I liked that. I'd probably like it now though. My mum turned me onto a lot of really great music though as well. She turned me on to Sade, and she's one of my favourite singers. I'm being tentative with this answer because I really need to hear the song again before I write it off. Maybe I'll really dig it now."

## The Song That Makes Me Cry

**Low** "Two Step", 1999



"Low are one of my favourite bands. They just have a way about them. Their earlier records are just so slow and beautiful. This song is just so gorgeous. It's not that I'm crying because of the lyrics, it's just a beautiful, beautiful song. I went through a period of loving that slowcore stuff. Slowdive and Codeine and Low."

## The Song I Wish I Wrote

**David Bazan** "Impermanent Record", 2014



"[Plays song on phone] David Bazan is one of my favourite songwriters. There's a lot of his songs that I wish I had written. There's a song off of his newest record, *Bazan Monthly Vol. 1*, called 'Impermanent Record'. He just has a way about him, I think his solo records are some of the best things to come out in recent years."

## The Song I Want Played At My Funeral

**City and Colour** "Body In a Box", 2008



"Seeing as though I have a song about how I don't want to have a funeral, I don't know what it would be. Maybe this song? And then everybody would realise, 'Oh, we shouldn't be here.' So if you're there, remind everybody that I didn't want a funeral."

## The Song I Sing At Karaoke

**Mary J. Blige** "Be Without You", 2005



"I've always wanted to be the Mary J. Blige to someone's Method Man. I love to sing along to female vocalists, especially Nineties R&B. I recently played at an event and she was in the audience. If I never sing on stage again, I'm OK with it – knowing she heard me sing. I hope she didn't hate it. Ha!"





## Sunnyboys Take a Dip, 1983

**Photographed by  
Francine McDougall**

"December 16th, 1983: I'd been shooting bands for a couple of years and was tired of grabbing a quick photo in some alleyway, or hotel room or seedy backstage area," says snapper Francine McDougall. "I was determined to mix it up. I have no idea how I managed to convince these guys to let me photograph them in their Speedos while falling backwards into Sydney's 'Boy' Charlton swimming pool, but it happened! They were super reluctant to do it, would only do it once, but were ultimately good sports. I remember thinking that they'll look back on this photo years later and be happy that they did . . ." 

**Rolling Stone**

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# THE FUTURE IS NOW

We profile five of the hottest artists who are climbing the charts, breaking the Internet or just dominating our office stereos ...

## GABRIELLA COHEN

**SOUNDS LIKE:** A lovesick guitar-pop caffeine overdose

**FOR FANS OF:** Moses Gunn Collective, the Shangri-Las, drive-in cinemas

**WHY YOU SHOULD PAY ATTENTION:** An envoy of Queensland's fertile indie scene and lead singer of Brisbane duo the Furrs, Gabriella Cohen is a recent transplant to Melbourne. Cohen makes good on the promise of last year's *Updated Regurgitated Sever EP* with full-length solo debut *Full Closure and No Details*. An album about "all the love business, and all those tragic things", it's a zesty gumbo of styles and flavours, throwing up snatches of girl group and doo-wop melodies underwritten by BVs from some of Brisbane's finest, including producer Kate Dillon (Full Flower Moon Band) and Bella Carroll (Moses Gunn Collective). Cohen's own hypnotic vocal swings from Kate Bush theatricality ("Yesterday") to something like Neil Young's vocoder experiments on *Trans* ("Feelin' Fine"). "All the songs were written in those typical Brisbane shady streets, in all the balminess, sitting on steps," Cohen recalls. "The album was recorded with two microphones, in the country, over 10 days, with just me and Kate."

**SHE SAYS:** "I love Velvets, I love Lou Reed, and I bloody love doo-wop. I grew up listening to a lot of Brazilian bossa nova, Paul Simon's *Graceland*, the Beatles. I think, what the audience thinks my style is, that's what the style is."

**HEAR FOR YOURSELF:** Garage-pop hymnal "This Could Be Love". GARETH HIPWELL





## KOI CHILD

**SOUNDS LIKE:** Seven tight and talented musicians forming a funky mind-meld and emitting a soul & hip-hop sound so live and loose you can practically taste the sweat and smell the ganja billowing out of your speakers

**FOR FANS OF:** The Roots, Mos Def, D'Angelo, Saskwatch, Hiatus Kaiyote

**WHY YOU SHOULD PAY ATTENTION:** Fremantle-based seven-piece Koi Child are the definition of a happy accident. Initially two separate bands – hip-hop trio Child's Play and nu-jazz quartet Kashikoi – the various members got together at a club for a one-off live jam in 2014 that far exceeded all their expectations. Sitting in the audience that night and witnessing the funky chemistry was Tame Impala's Kevin Parker, who was such a fan of the not-yet-a-band that he invited them to be the openers on a national Tame Impala tour in 2015 ("That was incredible; like a ridiculous dream come true," says South African-born MC/vocalist Shannon "Cruz" Patterson). Parker's involvement didn't stop there: he offered to mix and produce Koi Child's self-titled debut album, adding an airy, analogue warmth to the band's old-meets-new blend of funk, jazz, soul and hip-hop. With Triple J hit "Black Panda" already under their belts and the LP out in March, Koi Child are set to have a huge 2016 with a national tour in March and April that will allow them the opportunity to flex their considerable live chops.

la's Kevin Parker, who was such a fan of the not-yet-a-band that he invited them to be the openers on a national Tame Impala tour in 2015 ("That was incredible; like a ridiculous dream come true," says South African-born MC/vocalist Shannon "Cruz" Patterson). Parker's involvement didn't stop there: he offered to mix and produce Koi Child's self-titled debut album, adding an airy, analogue warmth to the band's old-meets-new blend of funk, jazz, soul and hip-hop. With Triple J hit "Black Panda" already under their belts and the LP out in March, Koi Child are set to have a huge 2016 with a national tour in March and April that will allow them the opportunity to flex their considerable live chops.

**THEY SAY:** "To record the album we took the jams we were working on and set them in stone – we structured them, I decided what raps I was gonna use and where," says Patterson. "Over 10 days with Kevin we recorded the album at Mangebong, a small island off the south of Perth – we needed to take a boat to get all our gear across, which we did with the help of a guy we called 'Tugboat Ted', who was really cool. It was kind of like a holiday; we drank a lot, it was a huge party."

**HEAR FOR YOURSELF:** Patterson's nimble flow ducking and weaving around the elastic bass and floating keys of "1-5-9", a perfect showcase for Koi Child's laid-back funk and liquid grooves.

JAMES JENNINGS

“

Touring with  
Tame Impala  
was “like a  
ridiculous  
dream come  
true”.



## PACES

**SOUNDS LIKE:** Tropical, positive dance music best enjoyed with a piña colada in hand

**FOR FANS OF:** Kilter, Flume, Kygo

**WHY YOU SHOULD PAY ATTENTION:** While the great 'Australian sound' movement of the early 2010s exploded around him, the Gold Coast's Mikey Perry was busy paying his dues. During the week he'd knock down in his home studio, hunting down vocal talents like Tkay Maidza and Kucka on the Triple J Unearthed website and putting them on his tracks. On the weekends, he'd build his profile playing at clubs around the country. Now Perry's regarded as one of the country's most skilled producers, and with a debut album about to drop, it's time for Paces to claim centre stage.

**HE SAYS:** "A lot of the time it was just cold calling, writing them an e-mail out of the blue or hollering at them on Twitter," Perry says of how he recruited 10 different collaborators for his debut LP, *Vacation*. "But during the whole process I was super focused on making the album cohesive. Because sometimes a producer album with heaps of different vocalists can come off sounding really disparate, like a collection of singles that have no flow."

**HEAR FOR YOURSELF:** Clean and crisp summer jam "1993 (No Chill)", the first single from Perry's debut full-length. KATIE CUNNINGHAM

## HIGHLY SUSPECT

**SOUNDS LIKE:** A Guitar Hero song that you've five-starred but can't stop playing

**FOR FANS OF:** Queens of the Stone Age, Velvet Revolver, Royal Blood

**WHY YOU SHOULD PAY ATTENTION:** Highly Suspect are from Brooklyn, and they've played shows with very Brooklyn-sounding bands (like Grizzly Bear) – but the hard-charging, Cape Cod-born rock trio sound like they'd rather guzzle battery acid than sip artisanal coffee. Their debut LP, *Mister Asylum*, received a nomination for Best Rock Album at last month's Grammys, and it's a hooky trip to the gutter with guitars that melodically gleam under the grit. Touring highlights include a stint on Bonnaroo, dates with

Scott Weiland and a trek with Catfish and the Bottlemen. Australian audiences can see what the fuss is about when they hit Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne this month.

**THEY SAY:** Highly Suspect's music is chaotic and barnburning, and it sounds like their live shows are no different. "There has been a disaster at every show in one way or another," says guitarist-vocalist Johnny Stevens. "A kick pedal breaks or an amp blows, or [drummer Ryan Meyer] has the flu and keeps his puke bucket right next to him – but it's our mission to never let the audience know when things are going wrong." They have a sweet side too: First single "Lydia" is about a failed relationship, but Ste-



"There has been a disaster at every show," says Johnny Stevens.

vens got to keep their cat, Pam. "I want to have my own house and a yard one day that she can explore," he says. "I wanna

have a nice warm fireplace nestled into a big hearth and on the shelf above it there will be a Grammy."

**HEAR FOR YOURSELF:** Stevens may have Pam on his side, but that doesn't make the static sludge of "Lydia" any less heartbroken.

LARRY FITZMAURICE

# LANEY JONES

**SOUNDS LIKE:** Sara Watkins covering Feist's "I Feel It All", fiddle and all

**FOR FANS OF:** Nickel Creek, Laura Marling, all the brothers' bands: Avett, Punch and Felice

**WHY YOU SHOULD PAY ATTENTION:** Things could have gone a lot differently for Laney Jones – the native Floridian was on her way toward a degree in international business when she realised she favoured singing and banjo strumming over trades and currencies, heading instead to Berklee College of Music to study songwriting under former *American Idol* judge Kara DioGuardi. It proved to be a good investment: a few years later, she was playing her quirky breed of folk-pop alongside Alison Krauss, who became an instant fan. There's a sheen to the tracks on her third, self-titled album and strings of penetrating hooks – those DioGuardi classes paid off big time – paired with rootsy instrumentation and Seventies-era flourishes that keeps it from ever ringing too twee. She's the kind of Americana artist who can work equally well on the indie stage of a bluegrass festival as in an iTunes commercial.

**SHE SAYS:** "I gained so much from talking songwriting with Kara," Jones says about her early mentor. "About looking at your lyrics and reading them down on the page, asking, 'Does it say something, is it effective?'" As for the sonic palette, she's focused on blending that pop sensibility with a wide variety of influences, from country to classic rock. "I love Seventies Bob Dylan, the Band. There are soul elements, too. It doesn't feel like we are colouring inside the lines. We're trying to be thoughtful with our arrangements and flush them out in different ways. I don't shy away from bluegrass, either. I still play banjo."

**HEAR FOR YOURSELF:** The bright and plucky "Allston (Dance Around)" from *Laney Jones*, due this month.

MARISSA MOSS



I love Seventies  
Dylan, the Band.  
There are soul  
elements, too."



# Brothers Gonna Work It Out

The Shultz brothers survived drugs, a tough Kentucky childhood and each other to make Cage the Elephant one of the best bands in rock

**By David Fricke**

PHOTOGRAPH BY  
PARI DUKOVIC





Brad (left) and  
Matt Shultz in New  
York, October



**HIS PLACE** was everything to me and Brad," Matt Shultz says as heavy rain pounds the windshield of his SUV. Shultz, the singer in the modern-rock band Cage the Elephant, has parked in the lot of a garden-apartment complex in Bowling Green, Kentucky, next to a building where he and Cage guitarist Brad Shultz, his older brother, spent their childhoods in the late Eighties and the Nineties.

"I wonder what it looks like inside," Matt, 32, says, looking up at his old home on the second floor. Wiry and talkative with light-brown hair framing still-boyish features, Matt laughs as he recalls the green shag carpet where he would find old bits of breakfast cereal, "like the marshmallows in Lucky Charms", and eat them like secret treasure. He points to a patch of grass where the local kids, mostly from low-income families, played baseball and at a line of woods where Matt and Brad, now 33, created an imaginary clubhouse, nailing pages from old porno magazines to the trees.

The singer also remembers his father's absences – Brad Sr. was a long-distance truck driver – and the hand-me-down clothes from older cousins that he and Brad wore to school, reminders of their parents' constant financial struggles. "Kids in Brad's grade would gather around him and chant, 'Poor boy,'" Matt says, still seething. The brothers later responded to those taunts with songwriting. "People talkin' shit, they can kiss the back of my hand," Matt sang in "In One Ear", on his band's 2008 debut, *Cage the Elephant*. "I felt an extreme conviction on the first record to get out of this town."

Founded in Bowling Green a decade ago, Cage the Elephant – Matt, Brad, bassist Daniel Tichenor and drummer Jared Champion – are now based across the state line, in Nashville. They are all married; Brad and Champion are fathers, each with a young daughter. A fifth member, guitarist Lincoln Parish, quit in 2013. But the original four have been tight since adolescence, writing their songs together and crediting them, U2-style, to the

Senior writer DAVID FRICKE wrote about ZZ Top's Billy Gibbons in RS 770.

group. "If the band broke up, you're losing somebody you've known your whole life," Brad contends, "not some guy you've known for five years."

Cage are their hometown's biggest rock & roll export. That first album went gold and included the platinum single "Ain't No Rest for the Wicked"; 2011's *Thank You, Happy Birthday* and 2013's *Melophobia* hit the U.S. Top 20. Cage's new album, *Tell Me I'm Pretty*, produced by Dan Auerbach of the Black Keys, is their best yet – melodically taut garage rock with psychedelic flourishes and a fighting edge.

In songs like "Cry Baby" and "Punchin' Bag", the spiky Pixies-style tension of Cage's earlier records has been honed into a pop-smart charge that Brad calls "John Wayne on acid at an Iggy Pop show". Tichenor, 35, puts it this way: "We're playing in this style," he says, pointing to a pile of LPs by the Smiths, T. Rex and the Beatles next to the stereo in his Nashville home, "but moving it forward."

**"Kids in Brad's grade would gather around him and chant, 'Poor boy,'" Matt Shultz says. "I felt an extreme conviction on the first record to get out of this town."**

Yet a few weeks before the album's release, Matt and Brad – who has a deep, drawling voice, a football player's build and short, immaculately trimmed hair – are back in Bowling Green, conducting separate tours of their band's genesis there. "This record – it was like we were those kids in Bowling Green again," Brad says as he passes a two-storey house on Park Street, in the downtown area, where he and Matt lived with their girlfriends and wrote songs. "I'd come running down the stairs: 'Matt, check this out!'" The brothers still collaborate like that – on their phones. "We'll write something," Brad says, "then text it over quick."

Brad stops at Spencer's Coffee House on Bowling Green's central square; the Shultzes' early band Perfect Confusion played there, setting up in the front win-

dow. "We'd get out of school," says Champion, 32, who was the drummer, "and just jam for three or four hours." Brad then heads for Tidball's, the city's long-running equivalent to CBGB. The members of Cage performed there as underage ragamuffins and still do occasional shows. One photo on a wall plastered with Cage posters and clippings shows Matt in action, hanging by his ankles from a chain across the club's ceiling. "He would do anything to impress somebody," Brad says with bemused fondness. "Matt's done tons of shit to himself – broke ribs, had stitches. He would push the limits every time."

Matt's spin around town includes Greenwood High School, the Cage boys' alma mater, and the trailer park across the road where Matt, Brad and two younger brothers lived with grandparents after their mother and father divorced. "See how deformed that bush is," Matt says, pausing at an old band house, also on Park Street. "People would get drunk and fall into that bush at every party we had." He smiles. "We had tons of parties."

Before he leaves that apartment complex, Matt gets out of his SUV and walks around his old building to a stretch of grass and trees where he, Brad and other kids happily played together until July 1996, when a neighbour, seven-year-old Morgan Violi, disappeared from the building's parking lot. Her body was found that October in Tennessee; her kidnapping and murder remain unsolved.

"A lot of innocence was lost," says Brad, 12 at the time. He and Matt started carrying pocketknives for protection and digging booby traps for predators. Matt is blunt about the change in him. "I was done," the singer says. "I didn't think about this part of my life anymore." He ended up in a disciplinary high school; did drugs ("mostly pills"); worked as a plumber; and relentlessly pursued music, inspired by records like the Strokes' *Is This It* and The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan.

Matt finally looks back at Violi's death on Cage's new album, in the spare folk rock of "Sweetie Little Jean". It is a song about losing someone to emotional distress; the lyrics also mention candlelight vigils and missing-person posters. "Severe depression – it can seem like that person has been abducted," Matt says. "It made me revisit Morgan's story. It was so hardcore." *Tell Me I'm Pretty* is, he adds, "very rooted in the past", about "coming to terms with the way things have played out".

Matt "can be very neurotic", says Auerbach, who got to know the singer when Cage opened shows for the Black Keys in 2011. "He doubts himself. He also knows that he's very good. He has a child-like amazement about music. He is a factory worker and starry-eyed dreamer at the same time."



**UNCAGED**  
Matt Shultz  
performing  
in Kentucky  
last July.

One stop on Matt's tour of Bowling Green is a building where he was a plumber on a construction crew. "My boss caught me writing lyrics – he said I couldn't write on the job," Matt recalls. So the singer jotted notes on walls and pipes as he worked. "When everyone else left at night, I'd go back and write it all down." Matt left his notes intact; they are still in that building. "I loved the idea," he says, beaming, "of leaving my mark."

**B**RAD CITES A GRIM STATISTIC as he presses through the evening traffic out of Nashville to Bowling Green: The guitarist personally knew 15 people in his hometown who died from drug-related causes – "pain pills, stuff like that", he adds later. As the Shultz brothers came of age in that city, there was "nothing else", Brad claims. "You play music, and you party. Or you go to church, and you work nine-to-five."

Matt got the title for "Ain't No Rest for the Wicked" from a construction worker who sold drugs on the side. "He complained about the police, looking over his shoulder," Matt recalls. "I said, 'Why don't you stop?' He said, 'Ain't no rest for the wicked, man.'" Matt ran to a truck where he had eaten lunch and wrote the line on the back of a paper plate.

"Going on tour was a saving grace" for Cage the Elephant, says Champion, whose mother is an addiction counsellor. "None of us were like, 'We don't want to go on

tour so we can stay home and do drugs.' We wanted the music." Still, he, Tichenor and the Shultzes all weathered periods of alcohol and substance abuse. Matt says he stopped taking pills after Cage's second album: "I went out to my dad's and did it Ray Charles-style" – cold turkey.

The Cage members all came from musical homes. Champion's father and grandfather were drummers. As a boy, Tichenor lived on a Christian commune outside Bowling Green and attended bluegrass festivals with his dad, Steve, a singer-songwriter who released albums on his own and performed in prisons. Steve Tichenor sometimes played at coffeehouses with the Shultzes' father – also a singer-songwriter. "He had some meetings with Word Records", a Christian-music label, Brad says of his dad. "He was always that guy who was one step away from actually doing it."

Matt and Brad were serious about music from a tender age. When Matt was three, he grabbed a soldering iron that his father was using to fix some music gear – by the hot end, pretending it was a microphone and turning his hand into, as Brad puts it, "a giant blister".

Cage the Elephant were together for only a short time when they recorded their first album and, through an early manager, got it released in Britain. They moved to London for two years, where they lived on Chicken McNuggets and struggled to build an audience amid "all this angular dance pop", Matt says. It wasn't any easier at home. Champion laughs as he describes a late-2007 show in Toronto, opening for

Queens of the Stone Age. "Nobody had heard of us," he says. "Matt is dancing, and nobody is getting into it. He jumps into the crowd" – which stepped back in unison. "He hit the floor so hard his shoes came off. But he got up, still dancing."

The next five years of roadwork and close quarters boiled over during the sessions for *Melophobia*. One day, during a heated argument with Matt, Brad pushed his younger brother over a glass table and stormed out of the studio. The guitarist, who didn't have his car, started walking home. "Matt drove up next to me," Brad remembers, "and was like, 'Dude, get into the car.' We drove around and cried it out. We're poor babies like that."

"That's Matt's thing," Tichenor notes. "He can be more forgiving, whereas it takes Brad a little longer. Sometimes he feels he has the upper hand as the older brother."

"We were raised by the same people, so we're similar in our values and morals," Brad contends. "We are very demanding of each other." Brad describes Matt as "more mellow. I'm more high-strung." But together, "we just won't settle".

"I don't want to paint too dark a picture," Matt says as he hits the gas in his SUV, pulling out of Bowling Green onto the highway back to Nashville. "The lessons I learned here about people, experiences, music, even the mistakes I made – it's all the same concepts you find in a bigger city, just on a different scale."

"Bowling Green," he says over the rain still hammering his windshield, "was a crash course in life."

**REPRESENT**  
Violent Soho in  
January: James  
Tidswell, Luke  
Henery, Luke  
Berdam and  
Michael Richards  
(from left)



FORM  
1  
LANE

# ROCKIN' THE SUBURBS

How Violent Soho navigated religion, drugs, poverty and personal tragedy to find their true calling

BY ROD YATES

*Photograph by Kane Hibberd*

**T**HE FIRST INDICATION THAT LUKE Boerdam lives in this converted worker's cottage in the West End pocket of Brisbane is the sign at the top of the stairs: "Kristie and Luke". Violent Soho's frontman and his wife have lived in this charming if slightly ramshackle two bedroom house since moving from Fortitude Valley in February 2015. Walk through the front door and you're immediately in the living room, a cosy space with worn wooden floorboards, a couch, a book shelf, a coffee table and a flat-screen TV, on which Boerdam was, until a few minutes ago, watching a documentary about World War II ("I don't think there's anything more fascinating than World War II in history"). Given some of his stilted interviews on YouTube, it's something of a surprise to discover just how verbose and well spoken the admittedly shy singer/guitarist is in person – in the space of a few minutes, and without prompting, the self-confessed IT geek veers between topics such as the mathematics behind



the Dark Net, the documentary techniques of American filmmaker Ken Burns, and the power of social media in facilitating revolutions such as those in Egypt and the Ukraine, whilst acknowledging that those tools are equally adept at aiding terrorists in their recruitment drives. Later, and without any hint of pretension, he references artists such as Degas and Picasso in making a point about art and creativity.

Offering a guided tour of his house, he stops at the small bedroom next to the living area, where he wrote much of Violent Soho's new album, *WACO*. On this Tuesday morning in late November it is stiflingly hot in there, which is fitting given that Boerdam admits to feeling the heat when it came to writing the follow-up to their breakthrough LP, 2013's *Hungry Ghost*. There is no musical equipment on display – it's all at the studio where the band are recording – but there is a Gold Record plaque congratulating Boerdam on the "outstanding achievement" of selling 35,000 copies of *Hungry Ghost*. A framed Dinosaur Jr. poster signed by the band's bassist Lou Barlow hangs nearby (it reads: "To Kristie, From Lou: re: signatures"). A computer and printer sit on a desk alongside a stack of books that no longer fit in Boerdam's overflowing book shelf. A casual glance reveals titles that go beyond the average rock musician's reading material: *God Is Not Great* by Christopher Hitchens; *Kitchen Table Economics and Investing* by Damian Lilliecrapp; *Economix: How and Why Our Economy Works (and Doesn't Work)* by Michael Goodwin. (The bookshelf in the living room is slightly more on point, containing works such as Kim Gordon's memoir *Girl In a Band* and Michael Azerrad's *Our Band Could Be Your Life*.) Boerdam laughs when you point out the Steve Jobs biography, though not because of the subject matter – one year he asked his parents for an iTunes voucher and they instead bought him a book on the Apple founder. "They never get it quite right," he chuckles.

Boerdam laughs a lot, be it to emphasise something that is funny, ridiculous, outrageous or just plain stupid. It surfaces as he recalls an interview early in the band's career where he said, "If you took our music and made a painting you'd call it Violent Soho." It's there when he relates how upon leaving high school he studied architecture, only to be warned off the profession by several different architects. "They said to me, 'Are you into it? Or can you do other things?' Well, yeah, I'm 18, the world is my oyster right now.' And they went, 'Well do that.'" It punctuates his story about how guitarist James Tidswell would, upon joining the band, tell his skater friends that

Boerdam was the frontman, and they'd always go, "The computer guy?" ("I was obviously known as being into computers, even if I didn't realise it.") And his laugh becomes a guffaw when he talks about the night his parents, Christine and Martin, saw Violent Soho play for the first time, at their gig at the Mansfield Tavern in November, 2014. "This is what my dad texted to me the day after: 'Hi Luke. We stayed until about 11.50' – specifics, good – 'enjoyed watching, very talented perf' – which is performance – 'had a good view. Mum says are you drinking enough water?'" For all of Violent Soho's achievements – being signed to Ecstatic Peace!, the record label owned by Sonic Youth guitarist Thurston Moore, in 2009; recording their second album with Foo Fighters producer Gil Norton in Wales; touring the U.S.; enjoying a remarkable career resurgence following the release of *Hungry Ghost* – this headline gig in Mansfield, a suburb in which they spent so much of their youth, seems to rank as something of a career high for each member. Later that afternoon when the band – completed by bassist Luke Henery (referred to by his bandmates simply as Henery) and drummer Michael Richards – gather at the Tavern for a lunch of burgers, schnitzels and, for vegetarian Tidswell, hot chips, they're offered the opportunity to walk into the live music room and have a look at the venue they sold out.

Today an imposing boxing ring sits in the middle in anticipation of a series of fights later in the week.

"From 1989, when I started going to school, until the year 2000 I came down this street every day, and on the blackboard they always had what bands were playing at the Rock Arena [the Tavern's venue]," recalls Tidswell. "So I read that. No Doubt did the Tragic Kingdom tour there, Lagwagon played there, the first time I saw Dustin Dollin skateboard was in that car park. And as soon as we got a little bit of ticket sales happening we were like, 'Fuck, let's do a tour, 'No Sleep Til Mansfield', and we'll start it at the Mansfield Tavern and go all the way around the country and come back to the Mansfield Tavern.' And to us, that was pulling off the impossible."

The thing you soon learn about Violent Soho is that they've made a career out of pulling off the impossible.

**R**EWIND A DAY, AND VIOLENT Soho are slowly but surely convening at The Shed, the studio in which they recorded *Hungry Ghost* and to which they've returned to make its follow-up with producer Bryce Moorhead. Tidswell once described the building as looking like it belongs in *Wolf Creek*, and he's right – it's literally a shed in the semi-industrial Brisbane suburb of Windsor, regularly buffeted by the displaced wind caused by passing semi-trailers. As you'd expect of such a building on a warm Queensland morning it feels about 40 degrees inside – until, that is, you leave the lounge/kitchen area and enter the air conditioned control room or one of the tracking rooms, at which point you could be in any world class recording studio. Richards, 31, appears first in white pants, blue shirt and white hat, looking like he's just come from a game of social cricket, changing the skins on his drums in preparation for today's tracking. To the left of the entrance is a stack of road cases, dumped there after Violent Soho spent the weekend recording the film clip for recent single "Like Soda", in which they flexed their acting chops by dressing up as the most bad-arse geriatrics ever to step foot on a bowling green. In the middle of the lounge/kitchen is a wooden table littered with bottles and a bag of weed; a Gold plaque for *Hungry Ghost* sits atop a piano, which

is flanked by speakers and a pot plant; to its right is a fish tank and a kitchenette, next to which is a toilet and shower. It's a basic set-up, but comfortable enough.

Boerdam, 30, surfaces next – he's been finalising some demos in one of the tracking rooms – followed by Henery, 31, who arrives at mid-

day with a case of XXXX that stays unopened for approximately 30 seconds. More solid in person than you'd expect, he's dressed in black jeans and a white shirt with "Listen To Volume Four" on the front. Last to arrive is Tidswell, 32, who's just come from a sauna where, he says, he was trying to sweat out some of the alcohol consumed on the video shoot. Moorhead still has some tinkering to do before he's ready to start recording, so the four trudge across the road and around a playing field to the Windsor Bowling Club which, on a quiet, suburban Monday afternoon, contains more poker machines than people. Schooners of XXXX are \$5, but so frequently did Henery and

**Editor ROD YATES** wrote the Chris Cornell cover story in RS 767.



### TIME LINE

(1) A portrait of the artists as young men (clockwise from top left): Boerdam, Tidswell, Henery, Richards. (2) Celebrating at Richards' wedding. (3) The group's very first band meeting, at Henery's house.



Tidswell come here during the early stages of recording that they're now treated to a one dollar discount in line with members' rates.

Violent Soho's shared history runs deep. Tidswell first met Boerdam at around six years of age when their families went to the same church in Carindale, called Gateway Family. Years later, Boerdam became engaged to Tidswell's sister, Amelia, until she broke it off because he wasn't a Christian. (Boerdam wrote early single "Jesus Stole My Girlfriend" about the incident.) Henery credits Tidswell with introducing him to punk rock on a family holiday, the guitarist encouraging Henery to

listen to *Dude Ranch* by Blink-182. And though Henery, Boerdam and Richards were friends all through secondary school – where a bully gave the drummer the unfortunate nickname 'Grogan', meaning 'shit' (Henery recalls a band meeting where he said, "I don't think we should call Michael 'Grogan' anymore. I actually like him!") – Richards wasn't as enamoured with Tidswell as the others. "I wasn't friends with James at all before being in the band," he says. "He was two grades above me. I hated all his friends and I didn't really care for him. But he was the brother of one of my best friends, Amelia, Luke's girlfriend, so that was how we

were all connected in a way. And because I did drama at school with Amelia I'd go around to her house and practice scenes and stuff, and James always used to tease us. So I'd be like, you're just Amelia's jock brother."

Also bonding the four together was a shared religious upbringing. Often referred to as the Bible Belt of Australia, ask them to explain what it was like growing up in and around Mansfield and they talk of an area that "was really good [and] safe", where "Pentecostalism was booming, people were frothing on it". Richards' father was a pastor, and the drummer learned to play in a church band from when he was 12. Prior to having their son, Tidswell's parents moved from New Zealand to Sydney "to start a church and go to Bible college with Brian and Bobbie [Houston], who now do Hillsong". He recalls watching his father preach most weekends, and at one point was sent to Korea "on a prayer mission". Boerdam remembers going to church with his mother and being shocked as adults "drunk on the Holy Spirit" convulsed as if they were having epileptic fits while speaking in tongues. He remembers his father burning his older brother's Nirvana CDs, calling them "the devil's work"; though Tidswell's dad had a more liberal approach to his son's taste in music (even helping him buy his first CD, Silverchair's *Frogstomp*), there was one song he wouldn't let Tidswell tape off *Rage: Meatloaf's "I'd Do Anything For Love (But I Won't Do That)"*. "It had the words 'I pray to the god of sex and drums and rock & roll,'" recalls the guitarist. "He was like, 'It's a good song, but we're not gonna play it. We don't worship that God.'"

Rather than fill each member with the spirit of the Lord, their experiences with religion and, more pertinently, the Christian schooling system seem to have scarred them. "People watch the documentary *Jesus Camp* as an example of psychological abuse on children, and that's how we were raised," says Richards. "And that's why with a total serious face I'd say religion in that way taught to children is child abuse."

Around a table at the Windsor Bowling Club they swap myriad schoolyard stories – Tidswell speaks of not being allowed in certain classrooms "because there were demons in there", and of having nightmares as a third grader after being shown a film about the Rapture, in which a teenager's parents were taken to Heaven but he was left alone on Earth because he was a non-Christian. Boerdam recalls going to class as an eight year old and he and his friends pretending to be able to speak in tongues to appease his teacher. Two girls who didn't know how, or rather didn't know how to pretend, ended up in tears when they were pointed out and

**PEDALS TO THE METAL**

Onstage at the Corner Hotel in Melbourne in October on the "Like Soda" tour.

the entire class was told to pray for them. "Lo and behold, 20 minutes after going through this traumatic experience these poor girls, who were actually the only ones with enough courage to be honest, ended up on the floor, [mimics speaking in tongues], shaking." Two or three years ago, Boerdam had an urge to look that teacher up and send him a letter about "how fucked up I feel this whole process was. You can't do that to eight year olds, it's disgusting." Richards, meanwhile, still remembers being shown a documentary in Year 8 "about how dinosaurs were actually dragons from medieval stories, and when they found dinosaur bones they actually found the dragons from the medieval stories. Queensland education," he sighs, "was not on top of that."

While they're keen to point out that their parents "aren't idiots", that they were "intending to do well" (Boerdam), that they "worked so hard to send us there" (Tidswell), that the "majority of teachers were lovely people" (Richards) and that those who weren't simply thought they were "doing God's work" (Tidswell), the effect this schooling had on each member is palpable. "The point of any education is to teach you to be an independent thinker, and to become autonomous and to reject any dogmatic thinking and rule," says Boerdam, who was in Year 12 when he told his parents he didn't believe in God. "And the more I look back on it it's

the opposite of how I ever want to educate my kids, because it's not teaching them to think for themselves."

"We've had to train ourselves to be almost cynical people instantly because we've all had to cope with that thing that happens when you become a rational adult and you realise all of the lies, and you become the owner of [your] own intellect," adds Richards. "In a way that's massively part of what our band's about. We don't even talk about it that way, but it is."

**L**UKE BOERDAM WAS 15 YEARS old when he started writing songs, learning guitar by playing along to Nirvana's *Unplugged* and Radiohead's *The Bends*.

"There's a certain youthful naivete to the world when you're growing up, that there's all these systems in place and if you just follow the rules you'll do well, and that illusion's smashed when you're a teenager," he explains. "From that point on that's when I found solace in writing lyrics."

Violent Soho's sole songwriter, the first song he ever wrote was a rap-metal anthem called "Baby Boomers Go Boom", which he played in his garage with Henery in Year 9. After going to the local music store and asking "How do you make a guitar sound like Grinspoon?", he was introduced to distortion pedals, and a whole new world opened up. Along with Hen-

ery and Richards he recorded a demo, which Tidswell heard coming out of his sister Amelia's stereo. "I was in shock," he says today. "I thought, he not only sings, he can write songs! He is a true songwriter!" After calling Boerdam, Tidswell was invited for a jam at Henery's house. So desperate was he to join the band that he smashed his guitar in frustration at not being able to play the song Boerdam was trying to teach him. "It was so funny," recalls Boerdam, "cause Henery's parents were in the next room, and here's James, 8 o'clock on a Monday night just going 'SMASH!' Smashing his guitar to pieces he was so frustrated!"

Henery's response was simple: "He's in the band for sure."

"From that point on," says Boerdam, "once the line-up was solidified it was serious."

The quartet messed around with some names – Boerdam blushes when he admits that early on they were called Show Room; they also considered calling themselves Ricki-Lee, delighting in the idea of disappointing anyone who turned up expecting to see the pop singer – and played their first ever gig at a friend's birthday party in 2004. They rehearsed on Sunday mornings at Richards' house, waiting for his parents to go to church before plugging in ("His neighbours were like, 'Fuck you, 9am on a Sunday!'" laughs Tidswell), after which they'd get stoned and go to Hungry

Jack's. They made a demo CD which contained a manifesto of the band's ideology on the back and an 'X' printed on the front ("to be minimal and cool," smiles Boerdam), and then spent three fruitless years trying unsuccessfully to get gigs in the city – their idea of 'making it' was to play Fortitude Valley hot spot Ric's and to be accepted by their favourite local bands, such as Dick Nasty, the Quickeners and Dollar Bar. Instead they schlepped around suburban venues like the Four Mile Creek Hotel in Strathpine playing to no one. For a group that, says Richards, thought "we were going to be on the radio and then be famous", and believed that the "instant crowd" provided by youth groups and the church scene would be easy to replicate outside those domains, the lack of progress came as something of a shock.

"No one thought we were any good," shrugs the drummer, who admits they couldn't actually play their instruments through this period. "We were from the south side suburbs. The scene at that time was only in the city, there was no suburban scene." Getting played on Triple J, says Boerdam, "felt unachievable".

It was during this time that the band's identity started to solidify. While stylised acts such as the Strokes and Interpol were making waves internationally, and gigs at the cool inner-city venues were being snapped up by more fashionable local acts such as the Scare, Violent Soho came to a realisation: "We were suburban, we were from a Christian upbringing," says Tidswell. "[We were] just coming to terms with not trying to be something we weren't. And from then on we really pressed the entire band into always being OK with who we are, and not really having a bravado, or not trying to play characters."

Tidswell recalls evenings getting stoned with a friend in his garage in Carindale, listening to the hip-hop show on community radio station 4ZZZ, during which he'd call up and pretend to be a gangster, demanding a "shout out to the 4122", Mansfield's postcode. Soon they were printing those digits on shirts and selling eight of them at a gig instead of one. When they finally got gigs at inner-city karaoke and pizza den Fat Louie's they'd get the 30 or so people in attendance to shout "4122" in solidarity. Slowly, a connection between band and audience was starting to form. All of which made Boerdam's decision to

quit all the more jarring. He was finishing his uni degree, and tiring of watching his bandmates write themselves off. "The other dudes were so off their faces every weekend, and eight weekends in a row we played these gigs to the same people and it was like, 'What, we're going to do this for two years? We'll become a joke. It's stupid.' I was like, I'm going to move on 'cause I'm not interested in getting fucked up every weekend like this."

The singer's exit was short-lived – soon after, Tidswell received a call offering the band a national tour with the Grates, and three months after Boerdam walked out, he was back and they hit the road. They've rarely stopped since.

**F**OR VIOLENT SOHO'S FORTITUDE was tested by years of playing gigs to no one in suburban venues, it was nothing compared to what they faced when they moved to America in late 2009. By that point they'd released their debut EP, *Pigs & TV*, in 2006, and their debut full-length, *We Don't Belong Here*, in 2008, and on the back of tours with the likes of Bit By Bits and Faker had started to enjoy what they once thought was impossible: Triple J airplay for the song "Love Is a Heavy Word". Magic Dirt bassist Dean Turner had taken on management responsibilities (years earlier, future DZ Deathrays vocalist/guitarist Shane Parsons had also expressed an interest in guiding the band), and those previously unattainable city gigs were now taking places at venues such as the Troubadour, where sold out signs would be placed on the door whenever they'd play. International interest came in the shape of a showcase for famed producer Rick Rubin (he passed on signing them), and a deal with Thurston Moore's Ecstatic Peace! label, which afforded them the opportunity to make their second album, 2010's *Violent Soho*, in Wales with famed producer Gil Norton. Suffice it to say, it was a long way from the band's early demos, on which Henery played a tuned-down electric guitar because he didn't have a bass.

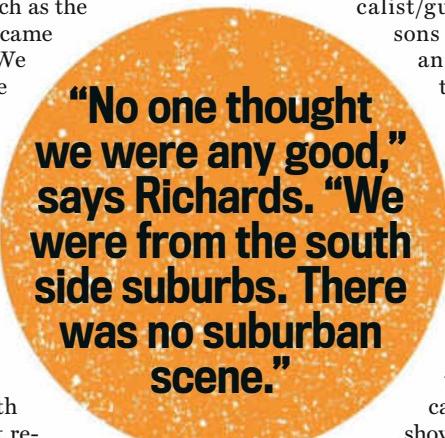
In their contract with Ecstatic Peace! it stipulated that the band had to move to America for 10 months, so along with their partners they decamped to Brooklyn and crammed nine people into a "tiny apartment". Finances were tight – prior to leaving for the States, Henery was in

the throes of setting up a photography business and had bought a car and camera equipment. He sold it all. "We were up all night on crystal meth and ecstasy, and then went to a car boot sale," says Tidswell. "Just a side note."

At one point, Henery was living off three 60-cent burgers a day, and recalls leaving for one tour with \$15 to his name. Three weeks later he returned with 70 cents in his pocket. Initial tours went well – shows with the band's heroes such as Built To Spill and Dinosaur Jr. – but before long they were exposed to the harsh machine that is the record industry when the A&R rep who had a vision for their trajectory was promoted; his replacement had them playing radio-sponsored gigs alongside the likes of Papa Roach and doing in-store performances at Best Buy department stores. "Literally where the fridges are," tuts Boerdam. "They'd turn off all the music and go, 'There's an Australian band in the corner, and if you just go to the home appliance centre...,' and then all these people would waddle over."

There were good times – tour antics such as when everyone agreed to pay Tidswell \$20 each to drink a Powerade bottle full of his own urine ("It was the first piss in the morning too, it was disgusting," he grimaces); gigs on the West Coast in Santa Rosa and Santa Clara where they'd draw crowds on par with what they'd pull in Sydney or Melbourne – but there were bad times as well. Such as the occasion when Henery got a call from debt collectors in Australia "saying I was fucked", and that his wage of \$150 a week (plus \$20 on show days) was leaving him with nothing to send home to pay bills. He was sure that "it was the end of the road for me", that he'd have to leave the band and fly home and that, upon his return to Australia, he'd be arrested. He reacted by trashing the Minneapolis venue they were playing in that night, First Avenue, which is owned by Prince – only to then clean up the mess when he realised they were booked to perform there again in three weeks' time.

On another occasion, the band were ushered into a radio station call centre where staff were phoning listeners and playing them songs down the line, asking which ones they recognised. Violent Soho were tracking poorly, they were told, so they'd have to record an acoustic version of one of their songs, and a cover. They declined. Despite the apparent mismatch, a tour with 30 Seconds To Mars in September 2010 offered some hope, but that collapsed midway through when Jared Leto's mob were nominated for a swag of VMAs, causing a week's worth of shows to be cancelled. Violent Soho couldn't afford to do nothing for a week, and so after 12 months' of living hand to mouth and growing increasingly disillusioned with the behind-



**"No one thought we were any good," says Richards. "We were from the south side suburbs. There was no suburban scene."**

the-scenes machinations of the music industry, made the decision to return home, burned out and broke. "We literally had nothing," says Tidswell. "We thought we were on top of the world selling out the Troubadour in Brisbane to 200 people, releasing our own CD," he adds. "And then when it came to [America] it was like, no, *this* is the game, the machine, and I think we were happy to say we don't have that in us. We're certainly not like these super slick bands that have perfect acoustic covers and do versions of their songs [for radio]. We don't have that in us. We're from Australia, we were so far out of our element. So we came home."

While Jared Leto was onstage at the VMAs accepting an award for Best Rock Video for 30 Seconds To Mars' "Kings and Queens", Richards was at a friend's house in Bundaberg watching the ceremony on TV, smoking a bong.

**N**O ONE WAS MORE SURPRISED by the success of *Hungry Ghost* than Violent Soho. Having had "some time apart" after returning to Australia, the album was constructed with minimal expectations and, according to Tidswell, its release rolled out exactly as they'd anticipated, with three to three-and-a-half star reviews across the board and a sole tour booked before they planned to return to their jobs. Come the end of 2013, though, the record started turning up in Album of the Year lists, and offers were extended to play the Falls Festival and the 2014 Big Day Out. The song "Covered In Chrome" landed at 14 on the Hottest 100. Early in 2014 came an invitation to play that year's Groovin the Moo, followed by Triple J's One Night Stand. When they announced a national tour in July, they sold out multiple nights at venues such as Melbourne's Hi-Fi Bar. After 10 years, Violent Soho were finally able to draw a wage from the band and play music full time. Henry welled up at the news. "[I was] working three jobs trying to support a kid and pursue [my] dreams. I did odd jobs on the weekend as well, mowed lawns. So to be told I didn't have to do that anymore, and I could actually play my instrument . . . I couldn't believe it."

The only member of Violent Soho who still works a day job is Boerdam, who has a part time position with the National Reconstruction Authority. "I just appreciate following multiple things in life rather than one," he reasons. "I'm not one of those people who has to dive in wholeheartedly to get stuff done and write songs. I think there's more of a charm in living, like going to an office job now and again, and going to pubs with workers and picking up inspiration that's somewhat real."

If there was a dark cloud hanging over Violent Soho's success, it came in the shape of a stroke suffered by Tidswell's father Paul during the Groovin the Moo tour. It occurred on the Friday before the final date of the festival, and Tidswell left his father's bedside to fly west to Bunbury to play the show. He pulled out of the One Night Stand gig (Raúl Sánchez from Magic Dirt filled in) to spend time at the hospital meeting with palliative care people so that he and his mother could look after his father at home. At the other end of the emotional spectrum, a few days after his father fell ill, Tidswell's daughter Poppy was born. Such was the stress of these events colliding that he suffered stomach pains so severe that he was in tears, unable to sit up. His initial thought was that he was suffering a bout of food poisoning, and so for the first three days of his daughter's life didn't touch her for risk of passing on his illness.

It's difficult to overstate the role Paul Tidswell played in his son's life. A salesman by trade, he introduced James to music and slaved to send he and his three siblings to school – at one point he was out of work for two years, and the family were so poor that Tidswell's father painted his son's toes black with boot polish to disguise the fact they poked out of his school shoes. Rather than encourage his son to get a part-time job as a teen, he instead paid him to read sales and motivational books and listen to motivational tapes. He implored James not to go to university, but advised him to get a job selling door-to-door because he'd gain communication skills he wouldn't learn anywhere else. It paid off – by the time James was 18 he was Optus's number one door-to-door salesman in the country, before his entrepreneurial skills took over and he quit to start his own car cleaning company, Amigos Car Detailing ("We'd wear sombreros and we'd always staple our cards and a thank-you note on a packet of Doritos," he laughs). At one point he and his partner (who went on to start the Uppercut Deluxe men's grooming empire) were clearing \$1200 a week each, but called it quits when the business started to interfere with their skating. Next they started a T-shirt company called Six Bucks Max before splitting to pursue separate interests. It's perhaps no coinci-

dence that today, Tidswell says his job in the band is to be "a bit of a motivator in the way of keeping everyone on track".

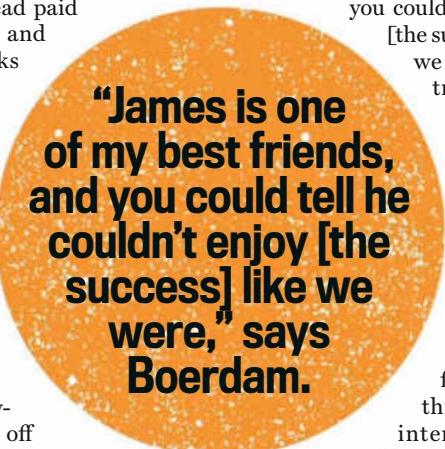
Standing in the kitchen of his neat, two bedroom house, situated just around the corner from Boerdam's, preparing a Tuesday morning breakfast of fruit salad and avocado on toast for he and his 18-month-old daughter Poppy, it's clear Paul Tidswell's stroke was something of a wake-up call for the guitarist. When Violent Soho lived in America, he says his breakfast consisted of Red Bull, cocaine and cigarettes. The Red Bull felt like an improvement over a fondness for crystal meth he had in his early 20s which, at one point, almost got him kicked out of the band. After vomiting blood down his arm in a cab in America ("I was peeling it off my arm like seaweed"), he decided to "tone it down a bit". Seeing his father in hospital compounded the decision.

"You certainly don't feel like McDonald's or KFC after driving home seeing your dad as a quadriplegic and not being able to talk from a stroke, really from what he put into his body. My dad didn't drink alcohol, and not only did I drink every single day, and a lot, I did everything else as well. So it was a shock to the system. My mindset completely changed, which led to me becoming vegetarian and taking care of myself."

"James is one of my best friends, and you could tell he couldn't enjoy [the success of the band] like we were, because of the tragedy that was happening," reflects Boerdam. "Even things like the birth of his daughter, the timing of it was so fucked up."

Tidswell's father passed away in early November, 18 months after suffering his stroke and three weeks before this interview. The 32-year-old found out his father was going to die an hour before giving an interview to Triple J to premiere "Like Soda", the first single from *WACO*. "I had to pull myself together and just stay in the mode of getting on radio," he says.

One of the upsides of the band's success is that it afforded Tidswell the opportunity to spend more time helping care for his father rather than working a day job, something for which he's clearly thankful. "It was worth the 11, 12 years' incredibly hard work, working two, three jobs, going on tour, sacrificing missing your girlfriend's birthdays, so much that people take for granted. Those 12 years that I worked so I could be there for my dad in the last 18



**"James is one of my best friends, and you could tell he couldn't enjoy [the success of the band] like we were, because of the tragedy that was happening," reflects Boerdam. "Even things like the birth of his daughter, the timing of it was so fucked up."**

months of his life . . . I couldn't be more grateful. It's the people who have listened to our music and supported us that gave me [that] opportunity."

**W**HEN LUKE BOERDAM sent his band demos of the first four songs he wrote for *WACO*, he made a point of apologising for "Like Soda", adding that he hated it. He felt bad, he says, because every time he goes into the studio to cut demos it costs the group money, and he felt like he'd underdelivered. His bandmates disagreed (as did the listeners of Triple J, who voted it 15th in this year's Hottest

"It's so important to experience culture," he adds. "The one thing I get scared of is kids not going to shows, or not getting into bands at all. I see that in America a bit where culture has become very monotone. Everyone's into the same thing, the same football team, the same sports, the same music, and nothing scares me more. Because that's the death of humanity."

Lunch with his band at the Mansfield Tavern beckons, so Boerdam hops in his black Suzuki Swift for the 20-minute drive from his house, during which he plays demos of two new songs at ear splitting volume – "How To Taste", which has a huge groove, a naggingly addictive chorus and an abrasive, snotty vocal per-

it easier to work on that album while having the distraction of a job, picking up the guitar only when inspiration struck. "The part of this last year or two where I have been cocooned in [my room at home writing]," he says, "I found it more difficult to come up with lyrics."

"I hit the wall at the beginning of the year going, what the fuck have I promised here? I can't write this!"

Still, he was determined. "There are bands that do good records, but when they follow them up, that's when they [prove if] they are sticking around or they're pissing off, that's all they had," he says. "I had that at the back of my mind as motivation, fucking proving to people that we're here to stay. There is more to this band than just *Hungry Ghost*."

And have you done that?

"I think we have. Success for us isn't did we sell this many records, it just isn't. It's did we make the music we wanted to make. And did we release it the way we wanted to? So I think we made the album we wanted to make outright. I'm more excited to get it done, 'cause there are some really kick arse songs I want people to hear. Simple as that."

A quick guided tour takes in Tidswell's old house, where Boerdam points out the room from which the guitarist would sneak out and smoke weed; the scene of Violent Soho's first ever photo shoot at the Amynia Street shops; and their old school. ("It's so funny 'cause we're never mentioned in the alumni magazine," chuckles Boerdam. "It's just this black mark: 'Here's four graduates, they went on to pretty much advertise weed smoking and coined 'hell fuck yeah' in the Australian cultural dictionary.") Once lunch is finished the group will return to The Shed to continue work on the album – Richards has three more songs to record before the others will set about laying down their parts. And then this band that started off thinking they'd be huge but couldn't get a gig in the city, that heard America calling but returned broke and disillusioned, that watched their career truly catch fire 10 years after it began, will unveil their fourth album amid much more expectation and fanfare than anything they've ever released. Regardless of how it's received, you sense that in their eyes they've already won.

"The one part I really get enjoyment of is when you open up Apple Music or go into JB Hi-Fi and there's Taylor Swift and there's Violent Soho, and it's like, fuck yeah," says Boerdam. "Cause if there's any legacy we're going to leave, it won't have the production quality or the sales [of Swift's] obviously, but fuck it, at least we offered something different. At least we got into kids' ears and gave them something that wasn't pitch-shifted, autotuned, played to backing tracks at the live show. It was real."



100). A song that Boerdam calls "a critique on modern suburban life being some sort of soul-draining sinkhole with uncompromising attitudes and stale daydream days thrown in", which "at the same time alludes to this ignorant speech declaring the quiet life is victory", it's clear that deeper currents of thought run through his lyrics than the "hell fuck yeah" refrain of "Covered In Chrome" might suggest.

Do you ever worry that the band's message gets simplified to that one phrase?

"I don't care, 'cause I'd rather there's kids screaming 'hell fuck yeah' than going to a football game and screaming 'kick the ball in the goal!'" he replies. "As the world around us becomes more soul draining and more digital and our experiences become less authentic, I think going to a fucking punk show and pushing the person next to you feels good. So I don't care if you think the message is just 'hell fuck yeah', I don't care if you think the message is, 'Violent Soho, they're just a bunch of stoners who want you to get angry', [just] come to the show."

**ON THE UP**  
On tour in Australia in 2007. "Success for us isn't did we sell this many records," says Boerdam. "It's did we make the music we wanted to make."

formance, and "So Sentimental", a more midtempo moment with a beautiful chorus straight out of the mid-Nineties. Getting the songs to this point has not been easy. Boerdam admits to having a degree of overconfidence after the success of *Hungry Ghost*, telling his band at a meeting in January last year that they'd be recording by March and then, after realising that wouldn't happen, June. They eventually started in the last week of July. For three months he went through a lot of "throwing out garbage that didn't feel new to me anymore", and rather than revel in the fact that going part-time at work afforded him more opportunity to concentrate on writing, that singular focus became stifling – he wrote *Hungry Ghost* while still employed full time, and found

# RHIANNON GIDDENS' HISTORY LESSON

## Carolina Chocolate Drops singer pays her respects to the past on solo LP

BY MICHAEL DWYER

**W**HAT'S YOUR DREAM RECORD?" THE QUESTION would be irresistible to any recording artist, but coming from Americana kingpin T Bone Burnett, it's virtually an invitation to travel back in time to seek the wisdom of the ancients; to right wrongs and advance the American way.

OK, maybe that's not exactly what Rhiannon Giddens was thinking when she accepted the über producer's offer to make her debut solo album, last year's *Tomorrow Is My Turn*. But after 10 years on banjo and fiddle with old-time American string band the Carolina Chocolate Drops, tending her own bow was furthest from her mind.

"I wanted to pay homage to these incredible women who kicked down doors and really had a lot more barriers than I've had," she says of the album that brings her to Australia for Bluesfest and a series of headline shows this month.

"There's definitely work to do as a woman in this industry, absolutely, but in this position I just realised that I'm very fortunate and I wanted to pay my respects to those ladies who inspired me so much, and continue to inspire me."

Touchstones on the album and its companion EP, *Factory Girl*, are as familiar as Patsy Cline and Nina Simone and as obscure as Sheila Kay Adams and Libba Cotten. From the blues-folk bedrock of Odetta and Sister Rosetta Tharpe to trad spirituals and Dolly Parton, the result is a vista of American folk history as filtered through some of its most resolute pioneers.

"The music always leads," says Giddens, who put down her strings this time to let her pure, powerful voice lilt above Burnett's remarkable house band (*O Brother, Where Art Thou?*, *Raising Sand*, *Inside Llewyn Davis*).

"I'm not ever going to pick [a song] because somebody's obscure, but I've been doing it so long in my work with the Carolina

Chocolate Drops that I do have a particular delight in shining a light where maybe it hasn't been too much."

The idea of lighting the dark has a particular resonance in the folk canon, of course. "Being a child of the South, a mixed race person, raised up learning about the Civil Rights movement", Giddens says the connection between music and social justice was a given that fed into the deeper musical exploration of the Chocolate Drops.

In recent years, her solo debut was preceded by a series of high-impact guest spots on albums steeped in American history, including the tribute to Johnny Cash's *Bitter Tears: Ballads of the American Indian* and *Lost On the River*, the album built from Bob Dylan's discarded lyrics from the *Basement Tapes* era.

Her extracurricular recordings continue to flow freely online, where songs such as "Up In Arms", "Cry No More" and "La Vie en Rose" spring up as gestures of succour and solidarity in response to global events.

"I find at 38 I'm just not willing to shut up anymore," she says. "It's our world and as musicians and artists, I really think we have a responsibility to comment . . . whether it's factory collapses in Bangladesh or [police violence and riots] in Ferguson. That's part of our job, to help people make sense of what's going on from an emotional standpoint."

From the working class servitude of that old Irish "Factory Girl" to the war-orphaned daughter in Geesie Wiley's "Last Kind Words", the power of the past to enlighten the present remains a major part of Rhiannon Giddens' craft.

"If you don't know history you're doomed to repeat it and if you do know history you're doomed to watch everybody else repeat it," she says drily. "That's one of the reasons why these old songs continue to have to be heard."





# WHO POISONED F

MUM MOVED MY TWO SISTERS and me to the appropriately named town of Flushing on the outskirts of Flint, Michigan, in 1980. My dad had just been killed in a plane crash, and she reasoned my Flint uncle would serve as a surrogate father. That didn't happen; he was a good man, but he had two boys of his own. We arrived just in time to watch a city die, as the auto industry disintegrated like a Chevette hitting a wall. This was only good for Michael Moore.

It did give me unfettered access to the Flint River. My uncle was a dentist, and his mansion was built on the proceeds of General Motors' generous medical plan. His

A WRITER RETURNS  
HOME TO FIND A TOXIC  
DISASTER, GIANT  
GOVERNMENT FAILURE  
AND COUNTLESS CHILDREN  
EXPOSED TO LEAD

BY STEPHEN  
RODRICK

house was adjacent to the Flushing Valley Golf Club, which bordered the river. The three months we stayed with him provided hours of creepy pleasure for a maladjusted teen. In pre-EPA days, factories had been dumping sludge and crud into the river for decades. Every day, my anti-nature walks brought new treasures: a dog carcass; the front grille of a K-car; and long, green bubbles of water that appeared to be living, malevolent, aquatic creatures with free will. Whenever I stuck my hand into the water to retrieve an abandoned tire or a shard of chain-link fence, my skin would come out a mottled crimson.

I moved away after graduating from Flint's Catholic high school, where I was mugged at a neighbouring 7-Eleven when

After Flint switched its water source to the polluted Flint River, residents took to the streets.



# LINT, MICHIGAN?

my teacher sent me to buy him some cigarettes. The jobs kept moving away too. To me, Flint became a self-deprecating anecdote. It was the city that tried to rescue itself with an auto-themed amusement park (hilarious!), had one of the highest per-capita violent-crime rates in the country (scary!), frequently finished near the top of worst-cities-in-America lists (true!), and so on.

Some 30 years later, I can't say I was surprised when my high school best friend, Gordon Young, a chronicler of Flint's slide in his book *Teardown: Memoir of a Vanishing City*, texted me that Flint, now in receivership and run by an apparatchik appointed by the austerity-mad GOP governor, was switching over from the Great

Lakes to the Flint River for its drinking water. All to save some bucks. I thought this was preposterous. Only in Flint – a city that makes Youngstown, Ohio, look like Miami – could this be a viable solution.

I texted back: "Man, that seems like a bad idea."

I had no clue.

By the autumn of 2015, news began coming out of Flint about undrinkable water, kids getting sick and a stonewalling state government. I headed back to Flint for a week. I saw orange water running from a hydrant. I read FOIA'd e-mails that prove the city and state decided not to chemically treat Flint's water, something required in every town, village and city in America. There was the woman

whose water tested for lead at a toxic-waste level. This was after officials told her she was nuts, even though her daughter lost chunks of her hair in the shower, while her four-year-old son remained dangerously underweight and his skin became covered in red splotches any time it was exposed to the water. And I met a pediatrician who discovered that the lead levels of kids under five in Flint were dangerously elevated. She became physically ill when a state official called her deluded. I was told that the few million dollars saved by the city on Flint water would now cost hundreds of millions to repair ruined pipes.

The human damage is incalculable. Think of a mother waking in the middle of the night to make formula for her baby

girl and unwittingly using liquid death as a mixer. Lead poisoning stunts IQs in children, many of whom in Flint are already traumatised by poverty, arson and rampant gunfire outside their doors. And for what? I hate to get all left-wing, but this man-made disaster can be traced to one fact: Republicans not giving a shit about poor kids as much as they give a shit about the green of the bottom line.

Recently, Michigan was forced to declare a state of emergency in Flint. Some of the public servants involved have resigned. Now, the feds and the state are investigating what one water expert calls one of the greatest American drinking-water disasters he's ever seen. In the coming months, we'll know if those to blame were criminals or merely incompetent jackasses.

Flint doesn't make me laugh anymore. It makes me want to punch someone in the face.

T SEEMED SO PROMISING BACK then. On April 25th, 2014 – coincidentally, the 34th anniversary of my family's move to Flint – town leaders gathered at the cavernous Flint Water Treatment Plant for a celebration. After a countdown, then-Mayor Dayne Walling pushed a black button, and Flint's water supply switched from a Detroit-based system to the Flint River.

There were some from the very beginning who thought this was a terrible idea, notably Flint's congressman Rep. Dan Kildee. "My first thought was, 'Are you kidding me?'" Kildee told me one morning in his office. He threw his palms up in the universal sign of exasperation. "We go from the freshest, deepest, coldest source of fresh water in North America, the Great Lakes, and we switch to the Flint River, which, historically, was an industrial sewer."

Walling pushed the button, and the civic fathers of Vehicle City toasted with water from the Flint River. This would turn out to be the worst B-roll in political history when Walling unsuccessfully sought re-election in 2015.

"I was never briefed on the whole treatment plan, with someone explaining what had and hadn't been done," Walling told me at an inexplicably successful crepe restaurant (with a sign reading "unleaded" below its water station) in downtown Flint. He'd championed the downtown revitalisation, and there was now a wine bar and some other amenities, but neighbourhoods still had shattered streetlights. Walling is a Rhodes scholar, but insists he was bamboozled about Flint's water and didn't get enough information from the state overlords. "It's time

for people to stop treating Flint like shit," Walling said.

The reason Walling didn't get all the information is simple: He was only sort of mayor. Elected in 2009, Walling took over a city that had hemorrhaged half its population over the past 50 years, and once contemplated taking a part of the city off the grid to save on infrastructure costs. There was a \$20 million budget deficit, as Flint was having difficulties meeting the pension requirements of union retirees who had worked in a more prosperous time and with a much larger tax base.

In 2011, Gov. Rick Snyder, a white-haired accountant who ran on the slogan "one tough nerd", took office. He quickly ordered the state to take over the management of cities like Detroit, which had become economically insolvent. Part of the state's reasoning for the takeovers was that it needed to step in to provide for the safety and welfare of citizens. Walling and the city council were stripped of their power, and their salaries were cut. Not surprisingly, the powerless city council attracted less than stellar talent. In 2013, Flint elected two convicted felons and two others who had declared bankruptcy.

But who benefited? It seemed austerity and budget balancing meant more than citizen welfare as state-appointed managers slashed union benefits. The city cut 36 police officers from a force already stretched so thin that if a handful of officers were processing criminals, there were literally no cops on patrol.

"It's like what's going on in Greece," says state Sen. Jim Ananich, who represents Flint and has a newborn he takes to his in-laws' house in nearby Grand Blanc for baths. "How did we get to a place where we've cut everything? There's nothing left but the books balancing. What the city looks like after that doesn't matter. As long as there's less red and more black, we're in good shape."

The transfer from Detroit to Flint water was just another bottom-line move. Flint was switching over in 2017 to a new pipeline that would serve the middle of the state with water from Lake Huron. (The city council cast a symbolic 7-1 vote in favour of the new pipeline. The state would later try to use this as a protective fig leaf to claim the city had approved drinking river water.) Detroit's emergency manager asked the state to intervene in the switch, and when that failed, the utility told the city of Flint that its contract would be terminated in one year. The problem then was what

to do between 2014 and 2017. Snyder's Flint emergency managers – four cycled in and out like scrubs in a game of hoops – chose the Flint River rather than renegotiating with the petulant Detroit water utility. The initial results were not promising. One resident described her water to me as "the colour of morning pee". When an aide to Ananich complained to the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality, she says she was told, "It's called the Clean Drinking Water Act, not the Tasty Drinking Water Act. We're doing our job."

Acceptable water standards had become a fungible term in Flint.

**O**N THE SOUTH SIDE OF FLINT IN the summer of 2014, LeeAnne Walters had filled the above-ground pool that sat in the yard of her two-storey home, with scraggly maple trees out front. She'd lived there for three years with her naval-reservist husband and their four kids, and they loved it. There were block parties and friendly neighbours; the children spent hours in the pool with their pals.

That summer was different. Her son Gavin would emerge from the water covered in red splotches. Doctors dismissed

it as dermatitis and, briefly, scabies. But when the Walters hosted a pool party and everyone emerged red and inflamed, she knew it wasn't just her son. On another day, she heard her 18-year-old daughter, Kaylie, screaming from the shower: "My hair is falling out in clumps!"

It made Walters think about her own thinning auburn hair. She did a survey of her brood – everyone was losing hair. Her water tank and was rust-coloured. It was around that time that the city had to issue an E. coli warning, urging all residents to boil their water.

I met Walters in November. She wasn't at her house the first time I stopped by, so I drove around the block and watched a Flint Water

Department truck let a hydrant pump out gallons of orange water. "We're just cleaning the pipes," said the worker cheerfully. When I met Walters, she wore a hoodie and faded jeans. She'd been a medical assistant before becoming a full-time mum. She was struggling to understand why the government would do this to her and her family. She wasn't an activist before, but circumstances had changed.

"I didn't know what the hell I was doing, but I started calling the EPA, looking up water on the Internet," Walters told me as

Additional reporting by Flint-based journalist SCOTT ATKINSON.

she fumbled with an unlit cigarette. "I had no idea how my life was going to change."

THIS IS WHERE IT GETS COMPLICATED in a profoundly stupid way. To fight off concerning levels of fecal coliform and E. coli, the city kicked up the amount of chlorine pumped into the water system in

ommendations was that residents should allow their water to run for 20 minutes to flush out the TTHM. This was met with much grumbling, but consent, in a city where water bills can be higher than mortgage payments.

In January 2015, Walters and a few dozen other citizens attended a hearing

year-old Gavin, who already suffered with autoimmune issues and was four kilos lighter than his twin brother, Garrett. His skin turned a fiery red every time it came into contact with Flint water. By this time, she forbade her kids from drinking the water. She started buying dozens of gallons of bottled water for cooking and instituted a five-minute-shower rule.

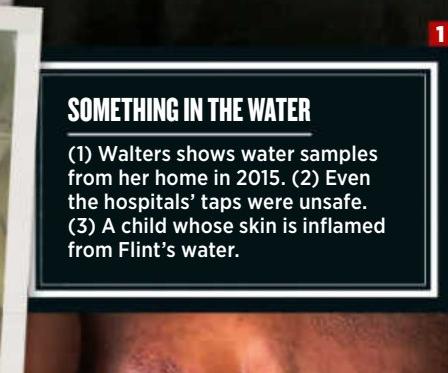
Walters called the city. After some hemming and hawing, they sent over a crew to test the water. The inspector left her an urgent voicemail one night telling her not to use the water until they talked. She called the next morning, and the inspector told her that her water came back with 104 parts per billion of lead. This was nearly seven times above the federal-action level of 15 ppb. The inspector recommended running the water for nearly a half-hour before using it, and he came back two weeks later. This time, Walters' water tested at 397. Panicked, she got Gavin and the rest of her family tested for lead poisoning. No level of lead is considered safe, but anything more than 5 micrograms per deciliter in the blood is considered highly damaging. Gavin's came back at 6.5.

Walters told me the story with her hands clasped together so tightly I could see her knuckles whitening. We went out on the porch so she could smoke. The city offered to fix her pipes and in return asked her to sign a no-harm agreement. Appalled by the horse trading over her kid's health, she fired back.

"I said, 'What the hell are you talking about?'" Walters told me with a sneer. "How do you put a price tag on your son? Your child being poisoned?"

Later, when we said goodbye, there was guilt in her eyes.

"You wonder what, as a mum, you could have done differently," Walters said, wiping away tears.



### SOMETHING IN THE WATER

(1) Walters shows water samples from her home in 2015. (2) Even the hospitals' taps were unsafe. (3) A child whose skin is inflamed from Flint's water.

the autumn of 2014. This resulted in Flint water testing for an unacceptable level of total trihalomethanes (TTHM), a contaminant composed of four chemicals that come together when heavily treated water mingles with debris and garbage in a water system. Flint citizens went from orange water to complaining that their skin was on fire after showers. Still, the city said the water was safe, as long as you were not very young, elderly or had a severely compromised immune system.

An old friend disagreed, but for a different reason. General Motors announced it was discontinuing use of Flint water in one of its plants, because the high level of chlorides found in the polluted Flint River could corrode engine parts. So while the state was saying the water was still safe to drink, GM was saying it wasn't safe to be used on car pistons.

Walters and the rest of Flint were told it was all going to be OK. One of the rec-

with Flint Emergency Manager Jerry Ambrose. She showed Ambrose plastic bottles with her orange water. He just shook his head and said there was no way the water came from Flint.

Walters was livid. Her daughter whispered to Melissa Mays, another concerned Flint mother, "I think she's gonna hit him!" Mays, a feisty tattooed woman, told me, "They called her a liar and an idiot." The two soon partnered on a crusade to figure out what the hell was in their water.

The whole Walters family had been ill since December 2014, but LeeAnne was particularly concerned about her four-

**B**ETWEEN INTERVIEWS, I PILOTED my rental car through broken neighbourhoods where my friends and I would buy beer at 16 from hypercompetitive liquor stores – the number of liquor licenses available lingers from the days when Flint had 50,000 more residents. I took a wrong turn and found myself down by the river, where some middle-aged men were fishing. I met two black men in overalls and with few teeth. They didn't want to give me their names because they were fishing without licenses. The older one said, "I've been fishing here for years, but I ain't ever eaten anything I've caught. There's something not right with the water." He showed me a giant pike he had caught that was flapping around in a white bucket without much enthusiasm. Its eyes were oversize and bulging, looking like Blinky, the radioac-

tive fish caught outside the nuclear reactor on *The Simpsons*. But his friend was less concerned. "If you're hungry, you'll eat anything." He smiled through his twisted teeth. "I mean, we're drinking out of it, might as well eat out of it."

After the initial lead readings came back, Walters became desperate. She began calling everyone from activists to random people at the regional office of the EPA. She got the attention of an EPA water expert named Miguel Del Toral, who came to her house, ran more tests and came to a startling conclusion. The water Flint used to buy from Detroit contained orthophosphate, a chemical used to control lead and copper levels in the drinking water. Del Toral wrote that once Flint changed to river water, "the orthophosphate treatment for lead and copper control was not continued". Del Toral warned that there was no chemical barrier to keep lead and copper from infiltrating Flint residents' drinking water. In plain English, Flint lacked a corrosion-control plan, something every water system in America has been required to have for years. To make matters worse, the water from the Flint River contained eight times more chloride than Detroit water. Chloride is a corrosive compound that causes pipes to rust and leach. At a time when Flint water needed more corrosion control than ever, it was getting none.

Walters gave the Del Toral document to the Michigan ACLU, which released it to the press, but it only drew attention from Michigan Radio. There was a reason for this: All of official Michigan denied there was a problem. In February, the EPA asked the MDEQ directly if the state was practicing corrosion control. MDEQ staffer Stephen Busch wrote back: "[Flint] has an optimized Corrosion Control Program [and] conducts quarterly Water Quality Parameter monitoring at 25 sites and has not had any unusual results."

This wasn't true; there was no corrosion control. Still, the state of Michigan launched a counteroffensive essentially calling anyone with concerns about Flint water a crank. "Let me start here – anyone who is concerned about lead in the drinking water in Flint can relax," said Brad Wurfel, spokesman for MDEQ. (He later described Del Toral as a "rogue employee".)

Internally, the MDEQ seemed more annoyed than concerned. In July, the ACLU's Curt Guyette pushed for more details, and an MDEQ staffer e-mailed co-workers saying of the Flint situation, "Apparently it's going to be a thing now."

Eventually, the MDEQ admitted the city hadn't been doing any corrosion control with Flint's water, and no one seemed overly concerned. Wurfel essentially said they didn't have to address it for a year. "You know, if I handed you a bag of chocolate chips and a sack of flour and said, 'Make

chocolate-chip cookies', we'd still need a recipe," Wurfel told Michigan Radio. "They need to get the results from that testing to understand how much of what to put in the water to address the water chemistry."

Apparently, Flint's citizens needed to keep drinking poisoned water for a year before the state could figure out how to unpoison their water.

I drove over to the Flint Water Plant with Scott Atkinson, a friend and, until recently, a reporter at *The Flint Journal*, the local paper that had heartily endorsed the switch to Flint River water two years ago. The plant was off Dort Highway, a desolate slice of Flint that I was warned to avoid as a teenager. The giant stone building seemed unmanned. We walked in on a weekday afternoon and could have pushed a series of buttons and knobs and created God knows what kind of ecological havoc. We found the main office, but it was empty. There was a cardboard box with plastic bottles, instructions on how to test your water at home and a number to call for more information. I grabbed a bottle and started to head out when I heard a radio playing behind a closed door.

Here in Flint, even the public employees seem to have gone into hiding.

**F**RUSTRATED BY THE lack of response from the state and city, Walters kept reaching out to anyone she thought could help her family. That April, she contacted Dr. Marc Edwards, a water-treatment expert who teaches at Virginia Tech and has received a MacArthur genius grant. She had heard of Edwards' work over the past decade on lead contamination in Washington, D.C.'s water and laid out what she was going through. That spring, he tested Walters' water repeatedly as a sort of ground zero for lead poisoning. The results were frightening. While the state downplayed the poison levels in Walters' house through an assortment of tricks, including taking a sample at a trickle rather than a steady flow, Edwards took 30 samples with steady water flow. The average came in at 2,300 ppb, and one came in at a nearly unbelievable 13,500, well above the EPA standard for toxic waste.

In August, Walters told Edwards that she and other activists had travelled to Lansing, the state capital, where MDEQ staffers had stonewalled them and dismissed their concerns. Edwards became so

angry that he and four research assistants drove from Blacksburg, Virginia, to Michigan. They began working with Walters and Flint citizens to collect samples of water for testing and acquired 280 samples.

Edwards' analysis determined that 40 per cent of Flint homes had tested over acceptable levels. He joined a press conference on the lawn outside City Hall and begged Flint citizens not to drink their water. The MDEQ spokesman Wurfel uttered another gem, decrying the research and saying, "[Edwards] specialises in looking for high lead problems. They pull that rabbit out of that hat everywhere they go. Nobody should be surprised when the rabbit comes out of the hat."

The state and city did their own testing. They managed to come up with only 71 samples. Originally, the city came in above federally accepted levels, but then the MDEQ instructed Flint to eliminate two of the highest test scores on technicalities. One was LeeAnne Walters' house. The reason? She used a water filter.

"It's amazing how hard they had to work to leave people in harm's way and all the lies they told," Edwards said to me a few weeks later, after his research had been vindicated. He's taken Flint on as a cause, and much of the information that's come to light came from FOIA requests made by Edwards. "We will throw a landlord in jail in this country if they do not disclose a lead-paint hazard in an apartment. It's that simple." He sighed and tried to maintain an even tone, but was unsuccessful. "Here, these fuckers were working overtime to cover this up and to keep kids drinking."

In the end, it was the kids of Flint that finally made the state of Michigan crumble.

Dr. Mona Hanna-Attisha, an Iraqi-American, is the director of the pediatric residency program at Flint's Hurley Hospital. On a typical shit-cold Michigan winter afternoon, she took me for lunch at a new farmers' market that had opened below her equally new pediatric clinic. Its location wasn't a coincidence; many of Flint's residents can't afford cars, so Hanna-Attisha had pushed for the clinic to be next to the central bus station and other state offices that serve underprivileged children. "If they can make just one stop, it increases the chances they use all the services," she told me as she mussed with the hair of one of her clinic's patients.

Hanna-Attisha had more than enough work and didn't need to get involved in the

**"IT'S AMAZING HOW HARD THEY HAD TO WORK TO LEAVE PEOPLE IN HARM'S WAY," SAYS A WATER-TREATMENT EXPERT, "AND COVER THIS UP."**

water crisis. A majority of Flint's kids are considered to be at-risk because of abandonment, high crime and lack of food. "A favourite question that we like to ask in pediatrics is, 'What do you want to be when you grow up?'" Hanna-Attisha told me. "You have kids saying, 'Oh, I'm gonna be Superman', 'I wanna be a ballerina'. And so many of our kids just stare at you because they just don't have hope. They have no hope."

Last August, Hanna-Attisha had a dinner party. She invited a former EPA staffer who briefed her on Edwards' findings. Soon, Hanna-Attisha was pulling recent blood tests at Hurley, Flint's main hospital, and comparing them to the previous year's.

"When pediatricians hear about lead, we freak out," Hanna-Attisha told me. "We absolutely freak out, because we know the kind of irreversible lifetime multi-generational impact." You can address the damage, she said, but it will always be there.

Prior to the switch-over, 2.1 per cent of kids tested at elevated lead levels. In tests administered between January and September 2015, the number spiked to 4 per cent and to more than 6 per cent in Flint's worst-affected neighbourhoods. She checked and re-checked the numbers before going public in September. The state's reaction was predictable. Wurfel said her research didn't match the state's and was "unfortunate" in a time of "near hysteria".

When Hanna-Attisha went home to her own two children, she felt physically ill and on the verge of tears. "I was trembling. As a scientist, you're always paranoid, so you check and double-check." She exhaled quietly. "But the numbers didn't lie."

Then something unexpected happened. After a few days, the state admitted that both Edwards' and Hanna-Attisha's findings had raised legitimate issues. It announced in October a million-dollar plan to provide filters for residents of Flint. Wurfel even privately apologised to Hanna-Attisha.

Not that the residents of Flint were done being abused. In an act of ballsiness, the state announced that Flint would switch back to its original Detroit water system at a cost of \$12 million, but Flint would have to pay \$2 million of that cost, demolishing its discretionary budget for the rest of the year.

In November, Dayne Walling lost his bid for re-election, largely because of the B-roll video of him pushing the button that set off the chain of events. It might be unfair, but Flint needed a scapegoat, and Walling's name was on the ballot.

Over the winter, e-mails obtained through FOIA requests by Edwards revealed that the problem with Flint's water could have been addressed months earlier if the state hadn't ignored red flags raised by administration officials. Before the new year, Snyder would accept the resignations of Wurfel and MDEQ head Dan Wyant. Wurfel, in hindsight, says he would have handled things very differently. "I regret



**LEADING FROM BEHIND** Gov. Snyder apologised and promised to fix the problem but critics call the effort "too little, too late".

this situation and my role in it," he said. "Deeply. I'm a father to a toddler, and I've had to look at him and imagine how I'd feel countless times. I'll carry that with me for the rest of my life." Edwards says corrosion control would have cost the state of Michigan \$80 to \$100 a day.

**O**N JANUARY 11TH, GOV. RICK Snyder arrived in Flint to face a furious city. He held a press conference at City Hall, in the same room where the powerless Flint City Council meets. The room looks like the auditorium of a high school you would never want your children to attend. It is dotted with broken chairs that, rather than having been repaired, are securely labelled with sheets of paper reading "broken chair". On more than one occasion, including on new Mayor Karen Weaver's inauguration day, I saw a bottled-water truck parked outside the building.

Outside the room, protesters, including Melissa Mays, shouted for the governor's resignation and waved gallon jugs of what looked like urine but was actually water that came from their kitchen taps. A television reporter asked the crucial question: "Some are calling for your arrest, others are calling you a potential murderer. How can you in good conscience not have done greater due diligence?"

Snyder gave a standard *mea culpa*: "I've apologised for what's going on with the state and I am responsible for state government." He went on to say he wished none of this had happened. Snyder noted that he didn't know the seriousness of the situation until October.

For that to be true, he'd have to have not read his e-mail. In July, his chief of staff, Dennis Muchmore, wrote: "I'm frustrated by the water issue in Flint.... These folks are scared and worried about health impacts, and they are basically getting blown off by us." (Not that Muchmore was a friend of Flint. In a September e-mail, he referred to water activists as the "anti-everything group".)

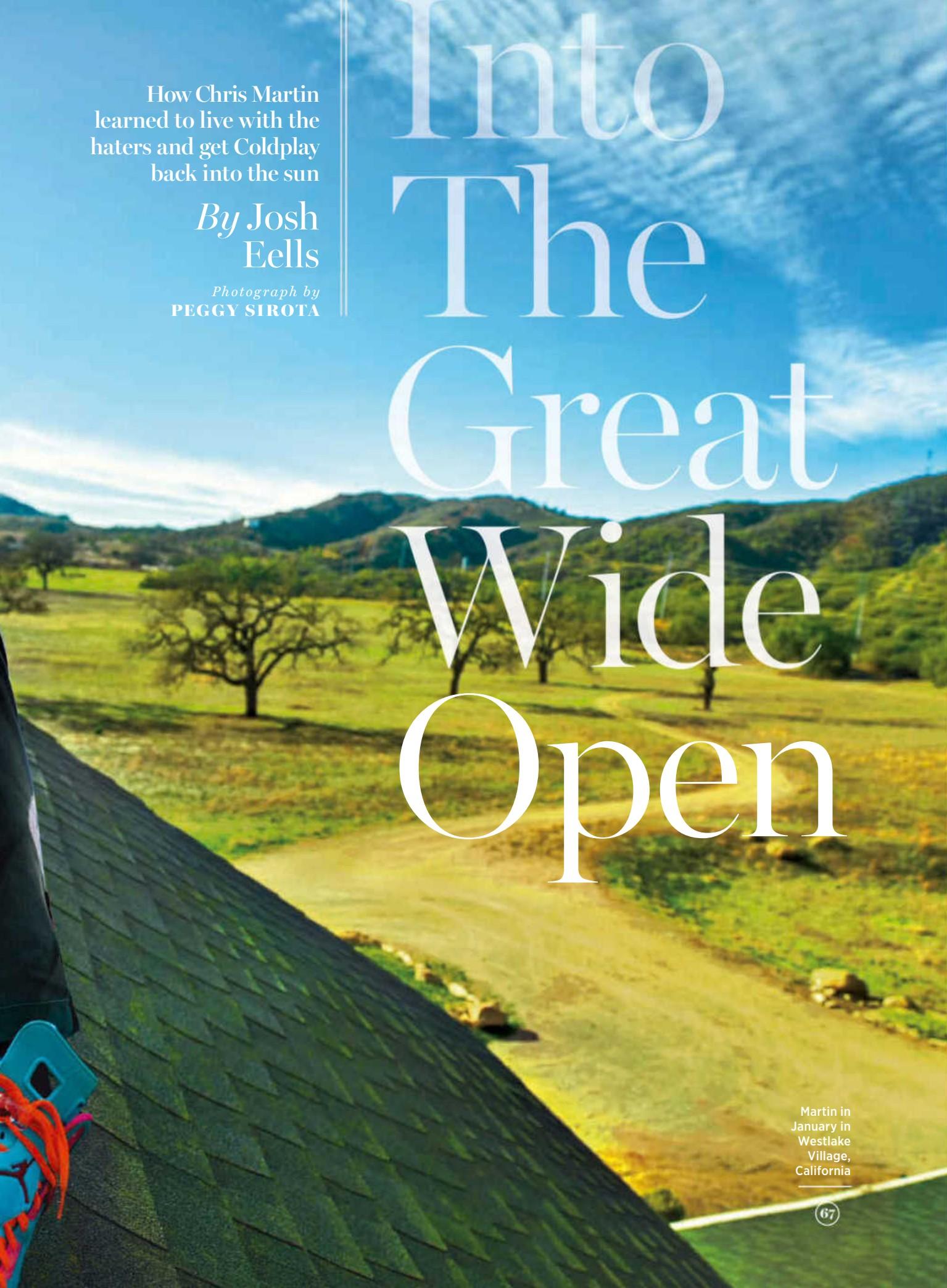
Snyder forged on, and speaking in a high, nasal voice, pledged all the state's resources to deal with the problem. (He had already asked President Obama to declare Flint a federal disaster area, something Weaver had been asking for since before her inaugural speech that I attended in November.) But there were signs that his administration was still in denial. First, a bureaucrat mentioned that only 43 Flint citizens had tested positive for lead poisoning. Then,

Eden Wells, the chief medical officer for the state, started talking about how lead comes from many sources and filibustered about soil and paint chips. (This led Weaver to move back to the microphone and correct the fantasy: "Today, it is about the lead in the water.") Finally, the governor's staff tried to shift some blame to old faucets at Flint schools. Standing in the second row behind Snyder, Hanna-Attisha just shook her head.

"They still really don't get it," she told me after the press conference. "They've only tested 43 because we've done outreach, and lead poisoning in the blood has a short half-life. There's no way of knowing how many people were affected before we started making noise." She fired off an e-mail to the governor's staff, telling them if they wanted to start rebuilding the trust of the people of Flint, this wasn't the way to do it.

That Friday, 150 protesters travelled to Lansing and stormed Snyder's office, calling for his resignation and criminal prosecution. (Snyder did not respond to requests for comment on this story.) The same afternoon, Michigan State Attorney General Bill Schuette, a Republican crony of Snyder's, announced he was launching an investigation into the water crisis. "The purpose of the investigation is to determine what, if any, Michigan laws were violated in the process that resulted in the contamination [Cont. on 104]





How Chris Martin  
learned to live with the  
haters and get Coldplay  
back into the sun

By Josh  
Eells

Photograph by  
**PEGGY SIROTA**

# Into The Great Wide Open

Martin in  
January in  
Westlake  
Village,  
California



**N A SUN-**kissed afternoon at the beginning of the year, Chris Martin hops out of his chauffeured SUV at a luxury beachfront hotel and stands on the Santa Monica boardwalk, inhaling deeply. "Isn't it beautiful?" he says, taking in the golden sand and the Pacific. "Amazing day." As it happens, "Amazing Day" is also a song by Martin's band, Coldplay, from their new album, *A Head Full of Dreams* – Exhibit A that Martin is very much in person the way he seems in his lyrics: exuberant, a little corny and easily amazed.

Martin stretches his legs and takes a minute to soak in the sun. He's got a swimmer's build, tall and broad-shouldered, with a few days of stubble and that ineffable famous-person glow. He's wearing a turquoise trucker hat with a yellow smiley face on it, and taken with his own countenance, the effect is almost redundant – a smiley on top of a smiley. He also seems to have consciously uncoupled from his shoes.

Martin lives just up the road in Malibu, in a \$14 million house he and his ex-wife, Gwyneth Paltrow, bought shortly before their 2014 split. "Right out there," he says, pointing up the coast. He woke up this morning and listened to two episodes of *Serial*, then, in an effort to get pumped up for the band's upcoming gig at the Super Bowl halftime show, watched all of *Rocky IV*. "*Rocky IV* has the most awesome training sequence of all time," Martin says. "I think it triggers the young boy in me who saw it and was like, 'Wow – if you wanna do something, just fucking lift logs!'"

Martin likes to be on the move, so we take off on a walk. He walks often in L.A., both for transportation and for recreation. "There's always been a flow of anxious energy running through him," says his best friend, Coldplay creative director Phil Harvey. Actor Simon Pegg, another old friend, suspects it's also a way to dodge paparazzi. "His trick is to move fast," Pegg says. "It helps that he has very long legs."

We head off down the boardwalk, past tourists, cyclists, rollerbladers, sea gulls. The barefoot Martin steps on a pebble and bends down to pick it up, conscientiously tossing it into the sand to save the next per-

son from the same fate. I take the opportunity to ask about his lack of shoes. Martin sighs. "I don't really like talking about it, because it makes me sound like a nob," he says. "But the truth is, two days before Christmas, I was volunteering at this place for homeless people, building a dog kennel, and someone accidentally dropped a massive panel of wood on my toes." At first he was worried they might be broken; it turns out they're not, but it still hurts to wear shoes. On the bright side, it was a good excuse to spend the holidays with Paltrow and their two kids, Apple, 11, and Moses, 9.

"It's always out there in the media, but I have a very wonderful separation-divorce," Martin says. "It's a divorce – but it's a weird one. So I was with them, and it was just lovely. It's fun to flip between the public music persona and 'Let's put together this IO Hawk – what do I screw-drive next?'"

I tell him that I'm impressed he could build an IO Hawk, one of those two-wheeled hoverboard contraptions. "That's actually a terrible example, because I didn't touch it," Martin says, laughing. "But you get my point."

Martin is famously one of the most charming people in music: unfailingly kind, unimpeachably generous and almost comically considerate. He's quick with a hand on the shoulder or a playful backslap, and he radiates enthusiasm and bonhomie. "It always irks me when he's portrayed as this shoe-gazing miserablist, because he's really, really silly," says Pegg, who says Martin once turned up to his house with his underwear pulled up to his chest, Urkel-style, "just for shits and giggles". Witty and self-deprecating, he can be humble to

a fault: "It's very sweet, but sometimes it's just like, 'Chris, shut the fuck up and stop apologising,'" Pegg says. "Me and Gwyneth used to go see them live, and he'd start playing some song and go, 'Sorry about this, we've got to play it' – and Gwyneth and I would look at each other and go, 'For God's sake, of course you fucking have to – everybody in the audience wants to hear it!'"

On the other hand, Martin has been very famous for more than a decade, and a sceptical observer might just see him as savvy about his reputation. For instance, when he very thoughtfully uses his iPhone to record an interview on a windy beach, just in case mine doesn't work – but then does the same in a very not-windy restaurant. Martin would shake his head at such

cynicism; at one point, he gives \$20 to a beach busker, and when I half-jokingly ask if he would have done the same if I weren't there, he looks genuinely hurt. "Yeah," he says sarcastically, "if you weren't here, I would have punched him in the face and stolen his guitar."

We've been ambling along for a while when I happen to spot a credit card on the ground. Someone must have just dropped it. "Briana," Martin says, reading the name from the front. "I don't think I have her number." He tries searching for her on Twitter. "Poor thing," he says. "She hasn't even signed it. What do we do?"

I suggest we take it and try to track her down online over lunch. Martin frowns. "Let's stay here for 10 minutes," he says. "If she comes back, we'll make her day. And if she doesn't, we'll do your plan."

So we plop down in the grass and wait. To pass the time, Martin tells a joke. "Have you heard about the Muslim guy who lost his wallet?" he says. I'm suddenly worried for him, but also curious where this is going. "Someone found it and gave it

back to him," Martin goes on, "and the Muslim guy was so happy he said, 'Listen – as a favour, let me warn you: Don't go to Glastonbury this year.' The other guy was like, 'Whoa, thank you. Why?' And the Muslim guy goes, 'Because Coldplay are playing!'"

Then we start talking about his New Year's Eve. Martin was with some famous people whom he'd rather not name. "But about an hour before midnight," he says, "I was feeling a bit anxious. Someone told me when you're feeling anxious, you should write a list of everything you're grateful for. So I tried it,

and it was amazing. A lot of what the, for want of a better word, ancient poets, the Sufis and Buddhists were saying was that if you can tap into that all the time, you'll become happier. And in my experience, it's true. I find that when I remind myself to be grateful, everything looks a bit better."

I ask him what was on his list. "A lot of things," he says. "First of all, just being here. Even that's enough to high-five the mirror. Wow, I get another shot today? So that was top of the list. And then I've got these two children that I love and a job that I love. I think we've been doing it long enough that I'm allowed to feel grateful for it." ("He's always going on about how grateful he is," teases Pegg. "It's his most overused word at the moment.")

*Contributing editor JOSH EELLS wrote about the Weeknd in RS 770.*



Eventually, 20 minutes have passed and still no Briana. "Time to face facts," Martin says. "She's not coming back. Have you read *Waiting for Godot*? That's what we've become. At some point, we have to go have lunch."

Accepting defeat, we head back. We're about five minutes down the boardwalk when a middle-aged guy pedals by on a bicycle. "Briana?" Martin says, joking.

"Yeah?"

We spin around. A few metres behind us, there's a twentysomething girl in jogging clothes with a hopeful look on her face. Martin's jaw drops. "You're not." "Did you find my credit card?" she says.

"Get the fuck out of here! You're Briana? We just Googled you!"

He hands her the card. "Thank you so much!" she says. "Oh, my God." If she has any idea it's Coldplay's Chris Martin, she doesn't show it.

"We fucking did it!" Martin says, high-fiving me. He turns back to Briana, concerned. "You need to sign that, you know."

## ARMY OF ONE

Above: Moses and Apple look on as Martin performs with Coldplay in 2015. Left: Beyoncé in 2006. Martin met the production duo Stargate when he wrote a song for Beyoncé that didn't work out. "She said, 'I really like you - but this is awful.'"

"I know," she says sheepishly.

Martin beams. "You don't understand how happy you've made us. You just made our day." He gives her a hug. "All right, Briana. See you later." She thanks him again and jogs off. "Wow," says Martin. "What are the chances?"

I tell him it seemed like we were almost more excited than she was. "We were *way* more excited!" he says. "See, man – how can you say there's not fucking magic in the world? It's everywhere!"

**B**ACK AT THE HOTEL, WE head out to the patio for lunch. "Do you like fish tacos?" Martin asks. "They have the best fish tacos here." He spent years as a vegetarian during his marriage to Paltrow, but these days, he says, "If Rocky eats it, I do too." Just as we sit, a reluctant manager comes over to say that he's very sorry, but Martin can't dine without shoes. Martin cheerfully runs to the car and returns shod, and when he does, he notices the actor Edward Norton at the next table.

"Hey, man, how you doing?" Martin says, extending a hand.

"Hey, man!" says Norton. "Fabulous. I surfed this morning."

"You did? Where?"

"Right on our beach."

"How was it?" asks Martin. "I looked at it, but it was kind of windy and bumpy."

"Fantastic," Norton says.

"Lucky boy."

"We should go out sometime. If you want to."

"All right, great," says Martin. "Cool." He comes back to our table and smiles. "One of my surfer friends."

Martin is joking: He and Norton aren't actually big friends, but they know each other in the way that most famous people kind of know each other. Martin says, as a kid growing up in the English countryside, he'd watch Hollywood movies like *Beverly Hills Cop* and *Swingers* and think, "How on Earth do you get there?" Turns out, he says, "all you have to do is play some minor chords."

Martin grew up in Whitestone, Devon, in what his father, Anthony, jokingly calls "the toe of England". Phil Harvey, who's known Martin since they were 13, describes him as "kind of an odd one out", and, diplomatically, "well-known without being Mr. Popular". "He was sporty, and he could make people laugh," says Harvey, "but he also cannot help but display his vulnerability. And I think that sometimes made him a target for people who were, on reflection, assholes."

Martin pursued music early, playing in teenage cover bands like the Rockin' Honkies (Otis Redding, Motown) and Bunga (Jane's Addiction, grunge). "I remember one time we played 'Been Caught Stealing,'" Martin says, "and this girl from the girls' school came up to me and said, 'You just ruined my favourite song.'" After boarding school, he went to college in London, majoring in ancient history, but he was really just there for the music. That's where he met the guys who would become Coldplay: guitarist Jonny Buckland, bassist Guy Berryman and drummer Will Champion. "Chris is like a sun in a solar system," Harvey says. "He just happened to get the right pieces of rock to come into his gravitational pull at the right time."

Pegg, who is godfather to Martin's daughter (and vice versa), first met Martin at a Coldplay gig in 2000, right after their first album was released. "We were at this afterparty and he said, 'Do you want to go for a walk?'" Pegg recalls. "So we walked to the ATM, and he was kind of freaking out about how big the band were getting. I remember sort of talking him down, like, 'Don't worry, man – it's going to be great.'" At the time, they were playing to crowds in the low four digits. Harvey was managing the band back then, and when its second album, 2001's *A Rush of Blood to the Head*, blew up, selling almost 20 million

copies worldwide, Harvey got sick and had to leave for three years. "And in the time that I was gone, he married Gwyneth and had two kids," Harvey says. "When I came back, I mostly remember being struck by his change in stature – both physically, and in terms of his presence. He held himself differently, in a good way. He was just walking taller."

Nevertheless, Martin struggled with the scrutiny of being in an A-list power couple. "Gwyneth had been in the lime-light for a long time, so she was much better at handling it," says Pegg. "Whereas I think Chris found it extremely confusing. It was flattering that people were interested – but, at the same time, deeply disturbing that people would make shit up or follow them around."

But these days, Martin seems to have grown at ease with his rarefied position. The band's new album features appearances by his pal Beyoncé (who sings on a club track called "Hymn for the Weekend"), as well as President Obama, whose rendition of "Amazing Grace" from the funeral of Rev. Clementa C. Pinckney is sampled on a song called "Kaleidoscope". Martin won't say how they got it approved, except that they asked a friend who was visiting the White House to put in a good word. Thankfully, Champion is less circumspect. "It really does help if somebody in your band is good friends with Bono," he says. "He can make anything happen. 'You want a unicorn? I know a guy.'"

Martin also capitalises on his fame by throwing his weight behind humanitarian causes like Oxfam's Make Trade Fair ("I think we did that, didn't we?" he jokes) and, more recently, Global Citizen's initiative to help end poverty. He says that if the trade-off is that "sometimes my life has turned into candy" – i.e., gossip – he really doesn't mind. "For two per cent of the day, I'm a celebrity," he says. "Most of the time, I'm a guy just trying to figure it out."

We get up to leave. As we do, Martin scribbles a little note on the back of the lunch receipt along with a doodle of himself. "Hey, Ed," he says, sliding it to Norton. "That's my e-mail if you want to surf."

"Oh, great," Norton says. "See you later, man."

"Cheers," says Martin. Then he heads off to pick up his kids from school.

**W**O DAYS LATER, IT'S flooding in L.A. – an El Niño-fuelled downpour has dumped four centimetres of rain in 24 hours.

On the winding road out to the Malibu studio where Martin did much of the work for *A Head Full of Dreams*, downed trees and rocks lie in the road, and the muddy canyons are covered in mist. It's the kind of weather that could

make an Englishman homesick. Naturally, Martin wants to take a walk.

"It's not so bad," he says, pulling on a wool cap and buttoning his jacket. "In a few minutes, the sun will come out and it'll be beautiful." It seems impossible, but sure enough, he's right.

As the skies clear, we set off down toward the ocean. Martin, who lives about a kilometre-and-a-half away, hadn't spent much time in the neighbourhood before moving here, but he'd read that Bob Dylan was a longtime resident. "He's a bit like Santa Claus to me," Martin says. "I don't want to see him or meet him, but it's nice to know that he's in the world." A black Prius drives by, and Martin stares at it intently. "Just checking," he says. "Sometimes you get paparazzi."

Martin moved here at a transitional time in his life; he and Paltrow had been having trouble for more than a year. "We'd just come off of this big stadium tour for [2011's] *Mylo Xyloto*," Martin recalls. "Finishing a big tour like that, there's a weird hollowness at the end of it. You've got two years of being needed every night, a lot of energy coming at you, and then it's all gone and you have to see what's happening in your personal life. So a lot of things were just...not there."

He's guarded about the times that followed, but friends say they were pretty dark. "Chris had a really bleak period," says Harvey. "He was in pain and struggling to see the light at the end of the tunnel. We were all worried about him – the band, his family." Worried about what? "Um...his safety? When someone's really, really low and on their own a lot, as a friend, your mind goes to the worst-case scenario. That period didn't last forever, but there was a time when we were all regularly checking in on him, just trying to make sure he wasn't on his own."

"When Chris feels good, he feels really good," adds Buckland. "And when he feels bad, he feels really bad."

Martin and Paltrow announced their separation in March 2014. Two months later, Coldplay released their sixth album, *Ghost Stories* – an unmistakable breakup chronicle, on which Martin sings about being "broken inside". Coldplay's best songs ("Yellow", "The Scientist", "Viva La Vida") have always had a kind of epic ache, mixing tragedy and uplift, but *Ghost Stories* was spare and grey – all cloud and no

rainbow. The band did little to promote it, playing few shows and giving no interviews. "It would have been a bit raw," Martin says. "A big public relationship had just ended, and there was a relatively intimate, sad album. It was sort of self-explanatory."

Martin believes there are two ways to cope with the end of a marriage. "You can come at it very aggressively and blame and blame," he says. "Or you can put yourself in the garage, so to speak. Take yourself apart and clean off the bits. Reassemble." His own reassembly was inspired by two works of literature in particular: Viktor Frankl's Holocaust memoir/psychotherapy manifesto, *Man's Search for Meaning*, and "The Guest House", by the 13th-century Persian poet Rumi. In the latter, Rumi compares the human psyche to a sort of emotional bed-and-breakfast, in which each new guest – joy, anger, sadness – should be welcomed and celebrated because all of them make us who we are. (It's basically the Sufi version of *Inside Out*.)

**Martin says he had "a year of depression" after the split, but now, "I have the tools to turn it around."**

Martin says he hasn't spent much time studying Sufism or any other Eastern traditions. ("I've seen that Kurt Russell film *Big Trouble in Little China* – does that count?") "But that one Rumi poem changes everything," he says. "It says that even when you're unhappy, it's good for you. So for someone like me" – who used to "flip between despondency and optimism, many times a day" – "I was like, 'What?!' It took me about a year to get it," he says. "A year of depression and all that. I still wake up down a lot of days. But now I feel like I've been given the tools to turn it around."

In the meantime, Martin had already envisioned a follow-up, which

he knew would be called *A Head Full of Dreams* – a big, optimistic pop album, full of upbeat rhythms and colours. "It's almost like he set himself a road map for getting out of his hole," Harvey says. "I think it gave him a framework to get himself enjoying life again."

Buckland says they felt free to be more optimistic, more danceable. "We'd worked the intimate melancholy out of ourselves."

To help oversee the album, Coldplay enlisted Stargate, the Norwegian production duo who've made hits for Beyoncé, Rihanna and Katy Perry. They'd met a few years ago, when Martin wrote a song that he hoped Beyoncé would record called "Hook Up", and went into the studio with Stargate to try it. (It didn't work out: "In



## LIFE IN TECHNICOLOUR

Above: Buckland, Martin, Champion and Berryman (from left) in November. After 2014's *Ghost Stories*, "We'd worked the intimate melancholy out of ourselves," says Buckland. Right: Martin with his high school band, Rockin' Honkies, in 1993.



the sweetest possible way," says Martin, "she told me, 'I really like you – but this is awful.'") Still, Martin liked Stargate and they got along, so when it came time to record *Dreams*, he asked them and the band independently if they might collaborate.

At first, "everyone was very sceptical – including me," Martin says. (Adds Buckland, "I think the rhythm section was much more sceptical.") According to drummer Champion, it was more like curious.) They were all mindful of what might be called the "Poochie effect" – "Hey, young people, we heard you like Avicii and Selena Gomez!" In the end, it was all about finding a balance. "There were some real pop, pop, pop songs that were like, 'That's too much, we've gone too far,'" says Martin. "And then there were songs that were too much the other way – where [Stargate] were like, 'Nah, that's a bit miserable.'"

The album debuted at Number Two. "It's way too early to tell if it was successful," says Martin. "But I know that I really love it."

Eventually our hike brings us to Point Dume, a craggy bluff jutting out over the Pacific. It's practically the definition of wind-swept. "Look at this epic place, man!" Martin says, stepping over a rope

marking the end of the trail. "You have to be careful. Don't get too close to the edge."

Martin scoots out to the edge of the cliff. "I want to show you this thing we did the other day when we were training," he says. Slowly, cautiously, he gets on all fours, his toes inches from the ledge. "So you do a plank right here, right?" he says, lifting himself up. "And if you look backwards" – he peers between his legs, upside down, at the expanse of sea – "you can't see land. It feels like you're flying."

All it takes is a little shift in perspective. "Try it," says Martin. "Isn't it cool?"

I do. And it is.

**H**E NEXT NIGHT, MARTIN is in the Pacific Palisades, after dropping Apple off at her theatre class. "Their mum is out of town, so I'm on dad patrol," he says. He seems exhausted. He spent the morning chaperoning Moses' field trip to the San Gabriel Mission. "It was hilarious – six adults, three teachers and 47 nine-year-olds," he says. "My eyes are tired." He forgot to pack his lunch, so

he hasn't really eaten. "I just have all the respect in the world for teachers," he says. "I said to them, 'How do you do this?'"

Martin heads off. "Come on, then," he calls. "Time for our daily walk." It's getting dark, and at one point, we're walking single file on the muddy shoulder of Sunset Boulevard, shouting over the cars and bushwhacking through tree branches to avoid being hit. I start to wonder if maybe the walks aren't a way for Martin to dodge questions as well as paparazzi. Back when they were married, Paltrow once said she "definitely [had] to coax things out of him when we talk", and I'm beginning to see what she meant.

Eventually, we find a Starbucks, and Martin sits down with a soy chai latte with "Chris" scribbled on the cup. I ask if we can talk about his divorce. "Go for it," he says. "It's been a long time, you know." I wonder how he thinks he's changed since the split. "You mean apart from all the ways we've been talking about?" he says, laughing. "It's hard for me to say, because I hang out with me a lot. But if I had to, I'd say I feel more grateful. And maybe a little calmer."

On my phone, I show him a clip from a Louis C.K. stand-up routine about divorce. The gist of it is, you shouldn't feel sorry for people who get divorced because things have to get really bad for that to happen. When C.K. jokes that you shouldn't say "I'm sorry" to newly divorced people because "you're making them feel bad for being really happy", Martin laughs loud and long. "I think what he's saying is that everything has its time," Martin says. "But he puts it a little more humorously."

Martin pauses. "It's funny," he says. "I don't think about that word very often – divorce. I don't see it that way. I see it as more like you meet someone, you have some time together and things just move through." Outwardly, at least, he and Paltrow are on such good terms that she appears on Coldplay's new album, singing backup on a song called "Everglow". Martin says he wanted her on it because "it shows that this thing [she and I] have been talking about, about us remaining friends, that it's really real". But again, he says, "This conversation [Cont. on 105]

The Beach Boys  
singer has been  
meditating for 49  
years. Why is it so  
hard for him to  
find peace?

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*By Erik  
Hedegaard*

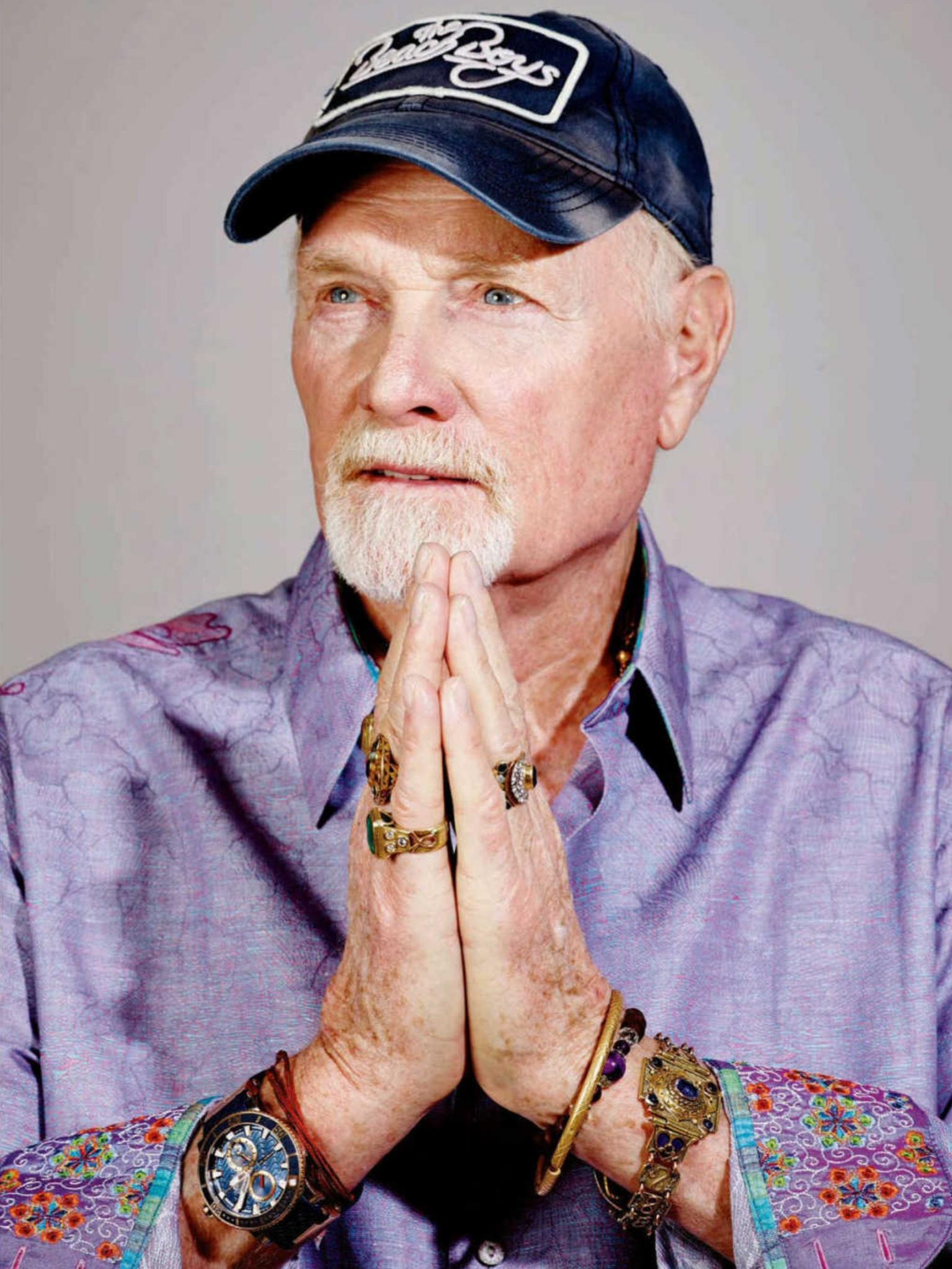
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PHOTOGRAPH BY  
BRYCE DUFFY

# Mike Love's Cosmic Journey

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**M**IKE LOVE BOUNDS UP THE STAIRS INSIDE HIS MASSIVE LAKE TAHOE home (10 bedrooms in all, 12 bathrooms, two elevators, not to be believed) and into a large walk-in closet stuffed to overflowing with garish, multicoloured shirts and a gazillion baseball caps, many of them emblazoned with the name of his band, the Beach Boys. A suitcase rests on the floor. Love nods at it, prods it with his foot. "A lot more shirts are in there," he says, "because, if you must know, I haven't unpacked." ¶ And why should he unpack? For the past 54 years, he and various versions of the Beach Boys, which these days include only him as an original member, have toured almost constantly. On his current outing, he has 172 dates lined up, cramming 19 European shows into 22 days this past December, for instance, and shortly thereafter flying back stateside to give the 6,500 citizens of tiny Avon, Colorado, the chance to hear all about California girls. From there, it's onward, evermore, venues big and small, makes no difference to him. The man is 74. You'd think he'd want to mothball the Beach Boys



caps and Hawaiian shirts he always wears onstage, maybe do something else with the years that remain. Not a chance.

"My cousin Brian loved the studio, but I like performing," he says. "I mean, I've probably sung 'Fun, Fun, Fun' live close to 6,000 times, and there are county fairs where we've broken the attendance records, playing to the biggest crowds they've ever had, 50- to 70-year-olds mostly, their children and their grandchildren. I love making music, and there's never been a time in my life when there wasn't music."

And the fans sure do get their money's worth, with more than 40 songs crammed into a typical two-hour show by the time "Fun, Fun, Fun" finally fades out, the soaring nasal twang of Love's bass-to-baritone range, so essential to the band's five-part-harmony stack, memorable and distinctive, leaving all the Dockers-wearing duffers buzzing happily, if not a little bittersweetly.

The Beach Boys: cars, girls and surfboards. Home movies on a backdrop. All the original members in a swimming pool, falling into and out of a life raft, laughing, fully dressed. Dennis Wilson, gone since 1983, drowned while drunk. Carl Wilson, cancer got him in 1998. Al Jardine, the band's Ringo, still kicking but quietly. Brian Wilson, 73 now, the group's musical genius, visionary, guiding light and the bearer of all those wonderful harmonies, a little wobbly in the mind since 1968, due to drug and alcohol problems and mental illness. Love, still going strong, looking fit and trim, just as he did back in the day, as always the entertaining cornball, joke-telling frontman, the souped-up, flamboyant counterpoint to his introverted cousin Brian, both entirely necessary to the band's enduring success.

At the same time, however, Love is considered one of the biggest assholes in the history of rock & roll. That's been the popular opinion of him for several decades. He just can't seem to shake it. There are "I Hate Mike Love" websites and a "Mike Love Is a Douchebag" group on Facebook. He's been called a clown, the Devil, an evil, egotistical prick, a greedy bully, sarcastic and mean-spirited, and, let's not forget, "if he were a fish, he'd be a plastic bag wrapped around the neck of a beautiful sea lion". Love is mostly able to laugh off this hateful venom, but on occasion he will break down, turn to his wife of 21 years, Jackie, and ask her, "What did I do? Why am I the villain? How did it get to this?"

According to his detractors, it all started in 1966, in a recording studio, with Love expressing his dislike for Brian's work on what became *Pet Sounds*, one of the greatest albums of all time. "Who's gonna hear

this shit? The ears of a dog?" he is said to have said, though he strongly denies it. A year later, he supposedly so criticised the *Smile* project that Brian, that beautiful sea lion of a man, shelved it for 37 years. He has sued or threatened to sue Brian numerous times. Plus, in the 1970s, he used to wear gold-lamé bell-bottoms that were so tight that his (somewhat enviable) package seemed to have equal billing with everyone else. He made the insipid 1988 song "Kokomo", which Brian doesn't appear on and that has become the biggest-selling Beach Boys tune of all time, Love so proud of lyrics like "Aruba, Jamaica, ooh, I wanna take ya." He coughed up \$5,000 in seed money so Tipper Gore could start her campaign to censor music. And then there's the baseball cap he wears everywhere he goes, on-stage or not. It's universally despised. Even wife Jackie isn't a fan. ("When we go out on dates, I always ask, 'Can you leave the hat at home?'") Everybody knows he's bald. He should embrace it.

He's wearing one today. He steps out of the closet and plucks it off his head. He bends forward. "Yeah, well," he says. "You really don't want to blind oncoming traffic, OK?" And back on it goes.

So, he's got his reasons for the cap, as well as for most everything else, a good bit of which, he says, is just plain flat-out wrong. "The fable is that I'm such an asshole, but a lot of that stuff is skewed by the

ticular, continued lighting up their brains with the more drugs and booze, the better.

Today, Love is tooling around in his wife's Audi SUV, taking a right onto Tahoe's Lake Shore Drive, the lake itself shimmering off into the distance. He looks quite crisp, happy, prosperous and well put-together: wool trousers, striped pull-over, his Van Dyke-type beard trimmed close. He talks in a friendly, easygoing way.

"When I learned to meditate," he says, "I said, 'Hallelujah. I can relax without all that stuff that fogs your mind up.' But everybody has their own path, makes their own choices. My addiction, if it's an addiction, is to meditation."

He has been up since seven this morning, already meditated and practiced yoga, eaten a vegetarian breakfast and spent time wondering how best to release his recent recording of a song he wrote in 1979 called "Alone on Christmas Day".

"It refers to the melancholy of feeling alone on Christmas Day," he says, "but I meant it sweet, in that you're never really alone. It fits a number of situations, whether it's a parent or a grandparent or somebody that you really cared for who is not there anymore."

Like Brian, Dennis, Carl and Al, one could say, but the point seems too obvious to make. So let's get back to meditation for a moment. Have there been periods where you haven't meditated?

## "I was cheated and stolen from by my uncle and my cousin, and I don't think it's ever going to be resolved. I mean, how you gonna resolve it?"

crazies," he says. "I never said half the shit that's attributed to me. I mean, I must be pretty prolific in asshole-type things to say, like, I get up in the morning thinking, 'I've got a job to do. How can I be a total jerk today?'" Later, he says, "I've become cannon fodder." He pauses and grins. He could pull back, or continue a serious discussion of how he has been pilloried and why it's so off-base, maybe even apologise for some of the things he's said. But such, apparently, is not his way. "It's o-pun season," he says, making a pun for pun's sake, with little regard for how it might sound to those around him.

**T**HE MOST IMPORTANT thing to know about Love is that he meditates twice a day, without fail, morning and night, and has done so for 49 years. He learned meditation from the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi himself, in 1967, at which time he forswore pot, hash and hard liquor, his only real vices, while Brian and Dennis, in par-

"Oh, no, that would not be safe," he says, chuckling. "I need to meditate. Well, let's put it this way. It's not good for me to miss meditation. And not good for others, too."

One time he skipped was in 1988, on the night of the Beach Boys' induction into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. Come time to make a speech to the crowd, he started off by saying, "We love harmony, and we love all people, too", after which he hurled insults at Bruce Springsteen, Paul McCartney, Billy Joel, Diana Ross and "chicken-shit" Mick Jagger, while insinuating that he and the Beach Boys were bigger and better than any of them. He struck a grim-as-death, tight-lipped pose and was greeted with jeers and boos. At one point, he said, "I don't care what anybody in this room thinks", which was clear enough. He also said, "A lot of people are going to go out of this room thinking Mike Love is crazy", which was true too.

He scratches at his beard, recollecting this awful, reputation-cementing moment, and says just about the only thing he can say: "Well, I didn't get to the punchline."



## THE FAMILY BUSINESS

Above: Mike Love (third from left) with the Beach Boys in 1968. Left: Love with Brian Wilson at the American Music Awards in L.A. in 1977. "I wrote every last syllable of the words to 'California Girls,'" says Love.



Do you regret anything about that night?

"Yeah, I regret that I didn't meditate," he says. "It helps you deal with whatever you're dealing with. I meditate in order to cope with things."

And over the years, he's certainly had a lot to deal with. There's the time, he says, "when my then-wife, Suzanne, mother of two of my children – I'd flipped for her, she really rocked my world – had an affair with cousin Dennis. Out of all the women in the world, you would think..."

What else? Has there been one thing, above all others, that's required meditation to cope with?

His blue eyes darken to gunmetal grey, and the bristles of his beard nearly stand up and quiver. "Yeah," he says. "The major one of those things is being cheated."

Ah, yes, that, of course. It goes way back to the start. Thanks to the Wilson brothers' father, Murry, who was an abusive, conniving piece of work, as well as the Beach Boys' first manager, Love's name didn't make it onto the publishing credits for many of the early hit songs. For instance, on "Wouldn't It Be Nice", Love says he was responsible for the ending couplet "Good night, baby/Sleep tight, baby", not an earthshaking contribution but significant nonetheless, as were the lines that he wrote for "409": "She's real fine, my 409"

and "Giddy-up, giddy-up, 409". And so on, with many other songs, including "California Girls", "Help Me, Rhonda" and "I Get Around".

Brian apparently knew what his father was up to but was too scared of him to do anything about it (Brian Wilson declined to comment for this story). Even so, Love seems to blame both of them, although, on occasion, he does acknowledge how cowed Brian was by his dad. And it doesn't seem to have helped that in 1993, long after Murry's death, Love successfully sued Brian for back songwriting credits, got his name appended to some 35 of the songs, and was awarded at least \$2 million in back royalties. The whole thing still pisses him off. And once he gets started on it, there's no stopping him.

He's in his house now. Waterfalls burbling, Chef Joaquin tending the stove, wife Jackie overseeing some interior redecorating, Pixie the little cat sleeping in the bed that Pumba the big dog should be sleeping in, and Love lost in the past.

"I wrote every last syllable of the words to 'California Girls', and when the record came out, it said, 'Brian Wilson' – there was no 'Mike Love,'" he says. "The only thing I didn't write was 'I wish they all could be California girls'. 'Surfin' USA', too, the big shaftola. Same thing with 'I Get Around', I came up with 'Round,

round, round, get around, I get around' and redid Brian's lyrics. And nowhere was my name mentioned on the record. Thank you, Brian. Thank you, Murry," he says with a laugh. "And, OK, so then what do I say? My only recourse was legal. But if I stick up for myself, Mike's an asshole. I mean, Brian wanted to settle, but he was in a conservatorship that wouldn't let him. I give him credit for that. But I was cheated and stolen from by my uncle and my cousin, and I don't think it's ever going to be resolved. I mean, how you gonna resolve it?"

In 2005, Love sued Brian once again, this time for "shamelessly misappropriat[ing] Mike Love's songs, likeness and the Beach Boys trademark" during the promotion of Brian's belatedly released *Smile* album, mainly because a tiny picture of Love with the Beach Boys found its way onto a promotional CD given out in a British newspaper. A judge dismissed all of the claims and said the copyright aspect "bordered on frivolous". But far from suing Brian at every opportunity, shouldn't Love, with all his years of meditation, have been the one to step forward and try to make peace?

He blinks at the question, rolls his eyes and curls his lip.

"When somebody in your family suffers from a mental illness, sometimes it's gone past the opportunity to have a normal relationship," he says. "I mean, there may be a feeling that, ideally, you would like to see peace in the family. And I have nothing but sympathy for Brian. But when you say 'peace', that would presuppose everything is peaceful. Well, when somebody has chosen a path or direction in life that has led to some pretty unhappy situations, everything isn't all right."

And he's completely serious. It's out of his hands. There's nothing he can do. It's enough to make you bang your head against the statue of Shiva, the Indian god of destruction, that stands in his house, or turn upside down the framed photograph of him, George Harrison, John Lennon, Donovan and others hanging out with the Maharishi back in the day. Then again, in 1968, Love said, "One of the greatest things [about Transcendental Meditation] that interested me was that [the Maharishi] said, 'You don't have to give up your Rolls-Royce and forsake all your pursuits of material pleasures to develop inner-spiritual qualities.' That sounded real good to me." And maybe all the lawsuits could be considered part of those pursuits, too, and thus fully justifiable, at least on an inner-spiritual level.

**I**N THE MAIN, HE'S A FUN AND engaging, slightly wackadoo-dle fellow. One day he's up in his home studio, playing "Alone on Christmas Day" and a few other songs, most of which he plans to put on a future album titled *Mike Love Not War*, and says, "I call it that because pun-ditry never dies." Many other puns feature his last name – about one song, he says, "A lot of Love went into that one", and then says, "It's a name you can have lots of pun with." He signs his autographs "Love Mike Love". He doesn't care if you groan. He expects you to. He'll never stop.

On the other hand, one can only imagine how frustrating and difficult it was for him at times, having to deal with Brian when Brian was in the throes of his drug-and-alcohol-induced delusions, crazy stuff, such as thinking that songs of his created fires in downtown L.A. Or when Brian was in full-on, persnickety, dictator-of-the-mixing-board mode. Or when Brian decided that surfing songs were passé.

The 2015 movie *Love & Mercy*, made with the cooperation of Brian, shows much of this history. And while Love does not come off especially bad in it, he was, he says, denied an advance screening and told, "Oh, go pay to watch it in the theatre." It's just another salvo in a conflict that seems without end. And he has no plans to see the movie. "I don't really need to see it," he says. "I've lived it."

The last time he actually played with Brian was during the 50th-anniversary tour, in 2012. The reunion ended badly, with Love going on to play dates with his version of the Beach Boys and Brian feeling like he'd been fired. "I'm disappointed and can't understand why he doesn't want to tour with Al, David and me," Brian said. "We are out there having so much fun. After all, we are the real Beach Boys."

Jackie says that during the tour, however, seeing Brian and her husband together again was really something else. "They're like two 16-year-old best friends," she says. "Once, Mike and I were giving Brian a ride during peak traffic in L.A., and they were like two boys out in Mum and Dad's car. Brian's like, 'Mike, so what are we gonna do?' and every few minutes, he'd say, 'Are we getting closer? Are we getting closer?' And Mike would say, 'Brian, look at the traffic. I can't go anywhere!' It's hysterical."

"Yeah," says Love. "I was very close to Brian growing up. We'd go to Wednesday-night youth meetings at the Presbyterian church and come home singing. We'd go outside and play the radio in his car, because my dad would throw us out of the house." He smiles at the memory, shaking his head. "So that was the kind of closeness we had as children, and then we wrote all these songs together."

The last job he had before becoming a Beach Boy was working in his dad's sheet-metal factory, cleaning dingleberries off welds, and pumping Standard gas at night. He was 19. He'd gotten his girlfriend pregnant, married her, lived with her in a tiny apartment, had no prospects, evidently felt no calling, thought about going into real estate. "What I might have done," he says, "is find run-down houses that need work, fix them up and resell them, but I didn't have a plan, per se." He grew up in Baldwin Hills, California, an L.A. suburb inland of the 405, but he spent a good bit of time 15 kilometres away, in Hawthorne, hanging out with his music-obsessed cousin Brian and putting an early, fleeting interest in surfing to good use, offering up lyrics like "Surfin' is the only life, the only way for me/Now surf! Surf with me!"

In late 1961, the song "Surfin'" entered the Top 40 on local record charts, hitting a high of Number 75 on the national *Billboard* charts, jump-starting what became known as the California Sound and, in due course, leading to all the hits, confusion, interminable feuds and untimely deaths of the past 54 years. Since 1998, he's been the sole licensee of the Beach Boys name and the only one legally able to tour using it, although they all share in the tour profits. When Jardine once attempted to go out as Al Jardine of the Beach Boys, Love slapped him with a lawsuit and put an end to that.

dial Mike out and make Brian a deity," says Bruce Johnston, who has played with the Beach Boys since 1965 and is still playing with the band today. "I mean, you get so swept away by Brian's incredible production abilities that people probably overlook the fact that they hear all this through Mike Love's words." Not even Dennis was immune to seeing brother Brian as the end-all, be-all. "Brian Wilson is the Beach Boys," he once said. "He is the band. We're his fucking messengers. He is all of it. Period. We're nothing. He's everything."

That attitude must have rankled Love. And even when Brian was at the height of his musical powers – which have not diminished all that much in the past several decades, as he still writes and records music, releasing three studio albums since 2010 – Love apparently continued to second-guess him, which is what ticks so many people off about him.

In 1966, during the recording of *Pet Sounds*, did you really say what so many people think you said: "Who's gonna hear this shit? The ears of a dog?"

"That's a bunch of bullshit," Love says. "I never said anything like that. All of us worked our asses off on that!"

And what about *Smile*? Brian has said your criticism of its trippy, experimental nature undermined his confidence and caused him to shelve it.

"But he's also said the opposite of that:

**"I have a sense of humour that's kind of wack, or sometimes bratty, so I get labelled with that, and there goes my image, right down the toilet."**

These days, when Jardine and Brian tour together, they tour under Brian's name, with no mention of the Beach Boys anywhere. ("They sound good," Love says. "Al has got a great voice, and his son Matt sings all my parts, but you know in the reviews they say he is singing Carl's part. It is bullshit – they are singing Brian's high falsetto on the original recordings. I don't know why people can't just be truthful and honest and own up to it.")

"Mike has his own vision of what the Beach Boys are, and he doesn't need us anymore," says Jardine. "It's like, 'Wow, that hurts.' I mean, he's obviously a terrific singer, and, oh, gosh, he's just so clever with lyrics, but his strength was his ties to Brian, who is, let's face it, the golden goose of all time. I think he really just wants to be back in the locker room at Dorsey High, being that guy who threw the most touchdowns – he has to have that recognition."

One reason is that many people, when they think of the Beach Boys, rarely think of him, at least not in a good way. It's all about Brian. "Everybody's kind of tried to

'Mike had nothing to do with it,' which is the truth," Love says. "I never said anything bad about any of the tracks. I admit to wanting to make a commercially successful pop record, so I might have complained about some of the lyrics on *Smile*, calling them acid alliteration, which even the guy who wrote them, Van Dyke Parks, couldn't explain. But I wasn't resistant to... I mean, crazy stupid sounds, like animals, farmyard sounds, did all that shit, laying in the bottom of an empty pool, singing up at the mic. I did all that stuff."

Later on, he sighs and rounds up on another, related thought.

"It was a crazy time, people fucked up out of their minds on stuff," he says. "You do a lot of pot, LSD, cocaine, you name it, paranoia runs rampant, so, yes, Brian could have become extra-, ultrasensitive to attitudes, you know, body language, or whatever. My psyche is mainly... except for the, maybe, moments of true frustration or anger or whatever, saying things in a way that's been misconstrued. Maybe I'm cast in that light, which is unfortunate

but maybe deserving. But can I be responsible? Should Mike Love take a beating for Brian's paranoid schizophrenia?" (Brian is diagnosed with schizoaffective disorder.)

Love continues, "My contribution was positive lyrics. Why the fuck should I be the scapegoat and the fall guy for that other stuff?" He says a while later, "Smile...that's a misnomer if I ever heard of one."

And that is about all Love will admit to. "He's reinventing his role in the band," says Jardine. "He feels it has not been [properly] expressed, so he's reinventing most of the things that are important to the songs he loves to perform."

The first time Love sued Brian was in 1992, for defamation regarding how Brian made him appear in his autobiography. His main complaint revolved around how little credit he was given for the songs he and Brian wrote together. "They disparaged me," he says. "It was like I hardly did anything and Brian did everything. It's like kind of trying to erase somebody from history or create another reality." The publisher, HarperCollins, settled the suit for \$1.5 million. Love has never read the book, which thus allows him to say things like, "At the risk of being facetious, it's my favourite book I never read, because what books have you ever read that paid you a million dollars?" He means this to be amusing, but it doesn't exactly come off that way. Crass, is more like it. He does acknowledge this, saying, "I guess a lot of people don't understand I have a sense of humour that's kind of wack, or different, or sometimes bratty, so I get labelled with that and there goes my image, right down the toilet." But it doesn't slow him down any and probably never will. To the school of himself, he is totally true.

**O**NCE AFTERNOON IN Lake Tahoe, he and Jackie are sitting down for lunch, about to dig into some pretty tasty quinoa burgers. Jackie's 22 years younger than Love and, because she's been married to him for more than two decades, can say, "I'm wife number six, but it's OK, because I've beaten the cumulative average." How long was the shortest marriage?

"Sue Oliver," says Love. "She was a great hang, but she was a fortune hunter. Lasted maybe six months." After that, he gives a rundown on the rest of the exes. One marriage was annulled. Another was with a Mexican mistake who liked alcohol and

pot better than meditation and me". Suzanne, the one who really rocked his world and had an affair with cousin Dennis, he says, once hired Manson Family murderer Susan Atkins as a babysitter, "which was kind of the last straw for me". Another wife he met at a meditation gathering, but then she "became overly fond of another meditative fellow, who was living in a com-

that's the story of it, right? The value of the music, and what it's meant to so many people." He shifts his weight, looking a little sad and uncomfortable, maybe thinking of something he'd said earlier. "Oh, man, going through the past like this," he'd said. "It's like digging up a rock and all these bugs are under it."

Most of those bugs, of course, have Brian's name on them, leading one to wonder what he might say to Brian if Brian magically appeared here right now?

He and Jackie are just finishing lunch and pondering some fine-looking gluten-free carrot cake. "What do you mean?" he says.

How would you greet him?  
"Oh, OK, well..."

Jackie speaks up. "Let me be Brian," she says.

Love looks alarmed. "No, no, no," he says.

But it's too late. Jackie has hopped onto her chair and is towering over her husband, both magnifying the actual height difference of the two men by about one metre and reducing the actual distance between them by about 700 kilometres. She puts on a deep voice. She's Brian now.

"Mike, hey, Mike!" she says.  
Mike is held speechless. Finally, he says, "What?"

"That's what you would say?" Jackie asks.

He laughs, awkwardly, and gives it his best shot. "Hi, Brian, what's happening?"

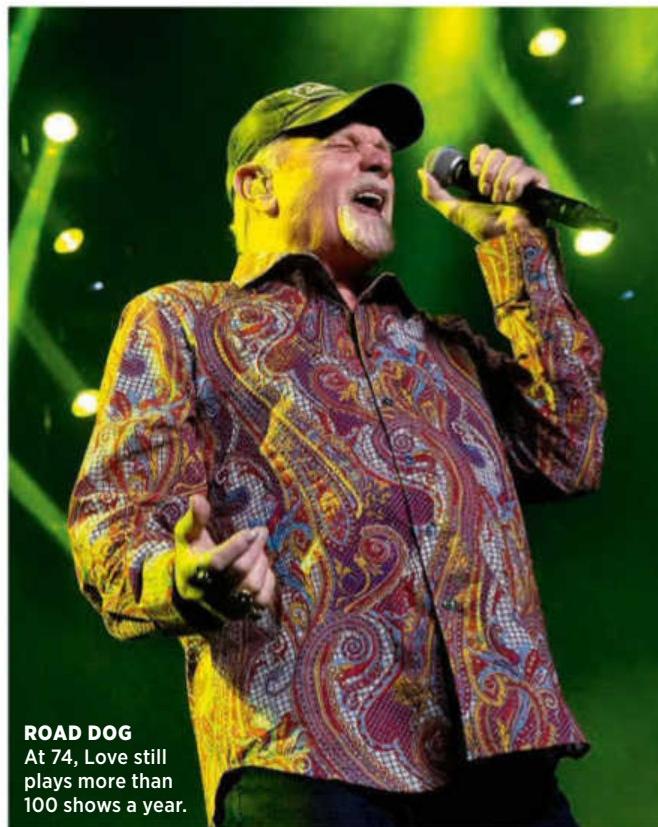
Deep voice. "Hey, Mike. I found you. Ya know, dude, what are we gonna do? I miss you, Mike."

Love drops out of the moment. "Brian probably would say that. If he had the ability." He giggles nervously.

Jackie isn't satisfied. She gets serious with him. "I don't want to make you cry, but would you greet him as being your cousin and collaborator in music first, or just as a collaborator? OK, so I'm Brian. You're seeing me. Express the personal part of it. What would you say?"

Many, many seconds go by.

"I'd probably say, 'I love you,'" he says, moisture gathering in the corners of his eyes. "And I love what we did together. And let's do it again." But then he gives his head a shake, narrows his eyes, any wetness there drying up, frowns and once again gives voice to what no amount of meditation can ever smooth over. "I've been ostracised," he says quietly. "Vilified. In other words, fucked with." He looks around for agreement. When none is forthcoming, he says, "Pass me the water, please", and, in such a way, lets it be known that some things will never change.



**ROAD DOG**  
At 74, Love still plays more than 100 shows a year.

pound I bought in Santa Barbara". And so on. As well, he can lay claim to eight biological children, ranging in ages from 20 to mid-fifties, although the early, horndog vagaries of his life may have resulted in at least one more.

And yet here he is, having survived it all. The biggest asshole in rock & roll history? No, not really. Egotistical? Without a doubt. Obtuse? He can be. Tortured soul? He'd like no one to think so. A Beach Boys history revisionist? To some degree, perhaps, which may be reflected in his memoir, due out this spring. Angry at Brian? Passive-aggressively, at the least. Mainly, he's turned out just the way he has, telling puns, living in this massive house, owning a Bentley and a Maserati, still thankful that the Maharishi did not frown upon material possessions, and still performing like not a day has gone by since 1963.

"Despite the obvious dysfunctionality of the Beach Boys as a group of human beings," he says later on, "to be able to take this music – all of these foibles and trials and tribulations, all of the unhappiness and self-destruction, the self-indulgent behaviour – but if you take the music,

# BOBBY CANNAVALE'S PERSONALITY CRISIS

How the 'Vinyl' star charmed Mick Jagger and got to play the coolest, craziest music exec that never was

BY ALEX MORRIS

**A** COUPLE OF YEARS BACK, Bobby Cannavale went to see Mick Jagger about a job. The Emmy-winning actor had been tapped by Martin Scorsese and Terence Winter to play the lead in a show that was being kicked around at HBO, but the project was really Jagger's idea – conceived two decades ago as a film that pulled the curtain back on the music industry of the 1970s – so Jagger was the man to please. And thus far, he hadn't been. "I remember being really freaked out about what the lighting should look like in my living room," Cannavale says now of a Skype call gone wrong. "I was like, 'I want him to think I'm cool.' So I wore black, you know? Black's rock & roll." The feedback Cannavale got afterward was that maybe he'd come off as too intense, too much like his (pathologically violent) bootlegger character on *Boardwalk Empire*, and not enough like the complex, drug-fuelled but ultimately redeemable music exec Jagger envisioned.

Which was how Cannavale found himself driving to Washington, D.C., with girlfriend Rose Byrne in tow, to see the Stones play and meet Jagger in the flesh. They went to Jagger's room at the Four Seasons ("I didn't even know a hotel room that big existed. Like, I couldn't find a bathroom"), they talked music ("I just tried not to say much"), and eventually Cannavale mentioned a YouTube video of a James Brown concert where both Michael Jackson and Prince came onstage: "Michael does the moonwalk and people go crazy, and then Prince is carried through the crowd on the back of his bodyguard. I showed it to Jagger, and he died. We must have watched it 10 times. I felt like, 'Oh, we're good now.'"

In fact, it's hard to imagine a person who Cannavale, 45, couldn't win over, as he tells this story from the back booth of the Knickerbocker, a favourite New York haunt where he greets the waitresses by

name. Byrne is due to have Cannavale's baby three days from now, but he's still got the easygoing vibe of a dude whose team tends to win. "You know," he says, "I grew up with a bunch of factory workers. It doesn't make any sense I'm here. When I stop to think about it, I think, 'Aw, something's gonna get figured out, and they're going to realise it's a fake ID.'"

Cannavale grew up in Union City, New Jersey, with an Italian dad who worked in a chemical plant and a Cuban mum who worried, with reason, that her oldest son was up to no good. "Like, the worst that we did was vandalism," Cannavale says, laughing. His mother encouraged him to get involved with their parish, which was how he found himself in the choir, working as an altar boy and playing a gangster in his first acting gig ever, a church production of *Guys and Dolls*.

After his parents' divorce and a couple of expulsions ("I was a class clown; the nuns didn't like that"), Cannavale (barely) got his high school diploma and began trying to get work as an actor across the river in New York, showing up at downtown theatres to ask for odd jobs, cleaning bathrooms in the hopes of having a few lines thrown his way. To get by, he worked as a guy who opened cab doors at Tavern on the Green, a bartender at the T.G.I. Fridays by Grand Central Terminal and as a greeter on the 88th floor of the Empire State Building ("That was only a week, because I was getting nosebleeds").

When he booked a show, he psyched himself up by pretending that Al Pacino would be coming to see it, and while Pacino didn't come in those days, Sidney Lumet's daughter did. They met, married and had a son when Cannavale was 25. They divorced in 2003, but not before Lumet became, as Cannavale puts it, "like

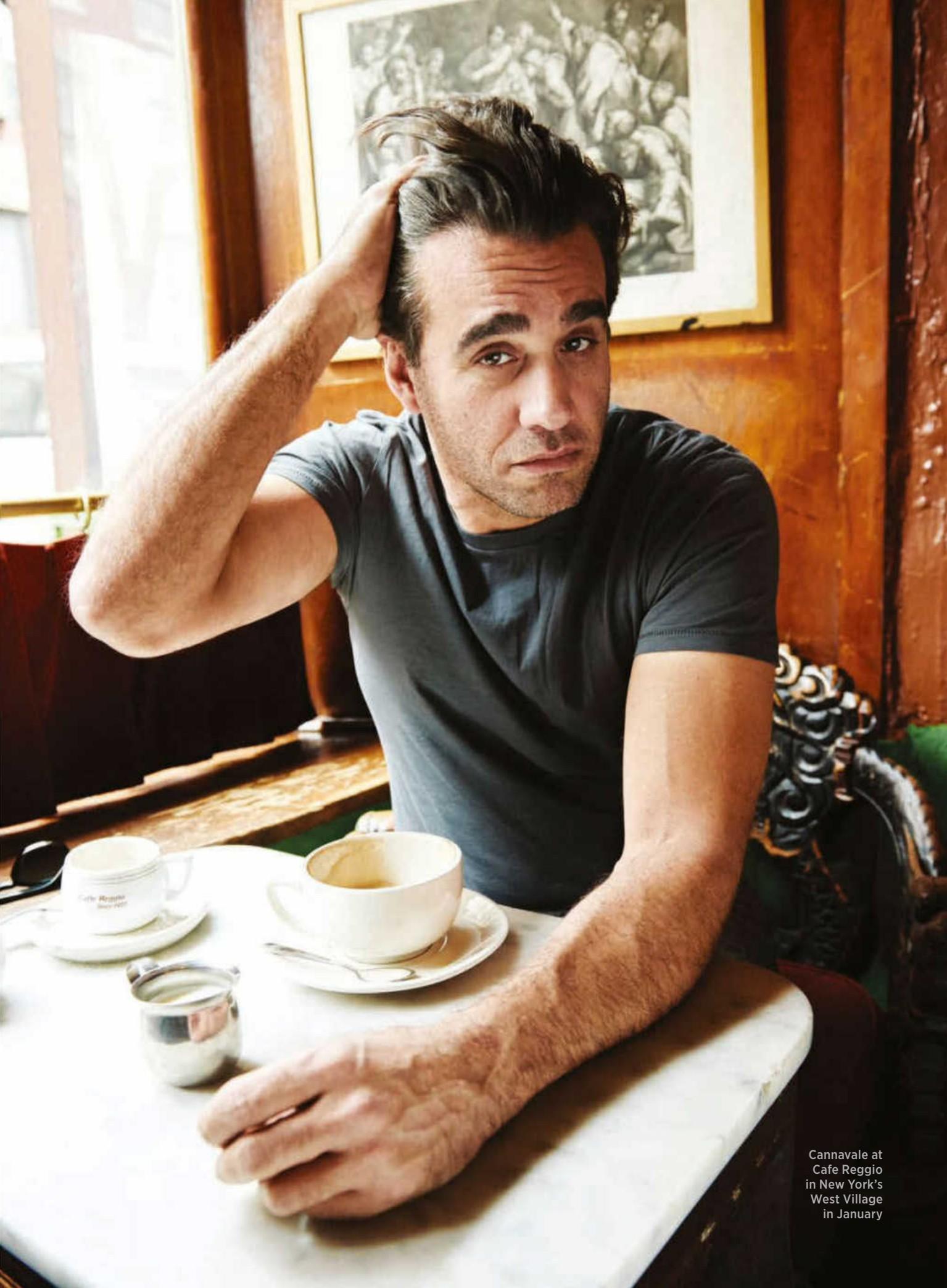
a dad to me" – one of many older mentors he credits for his success.

*Boardwalk* was the breakout role he'd longed for (though he had already gotten that Emmy for playing Will's boyfriend on *Will & Grace*). At his first table read, he was seated next to Scorsese. "If you're an actor from New York and you're Italian-American," Cannavale says, "you grow up hoping Marty Scorsese knows your name at some point before you die. And the very first scene, I beat this old guy to death with a wrench, and Marty was laughing hysterically at the violence. He kept hitting me under the table, hitting my knee, going, 'Ah, you're gonna be so great!'

"I wanted him to think I was cool," Cannavale says of his first Skype call to Mick Jagger. "So I wore black, you know? Black's rock & roll."

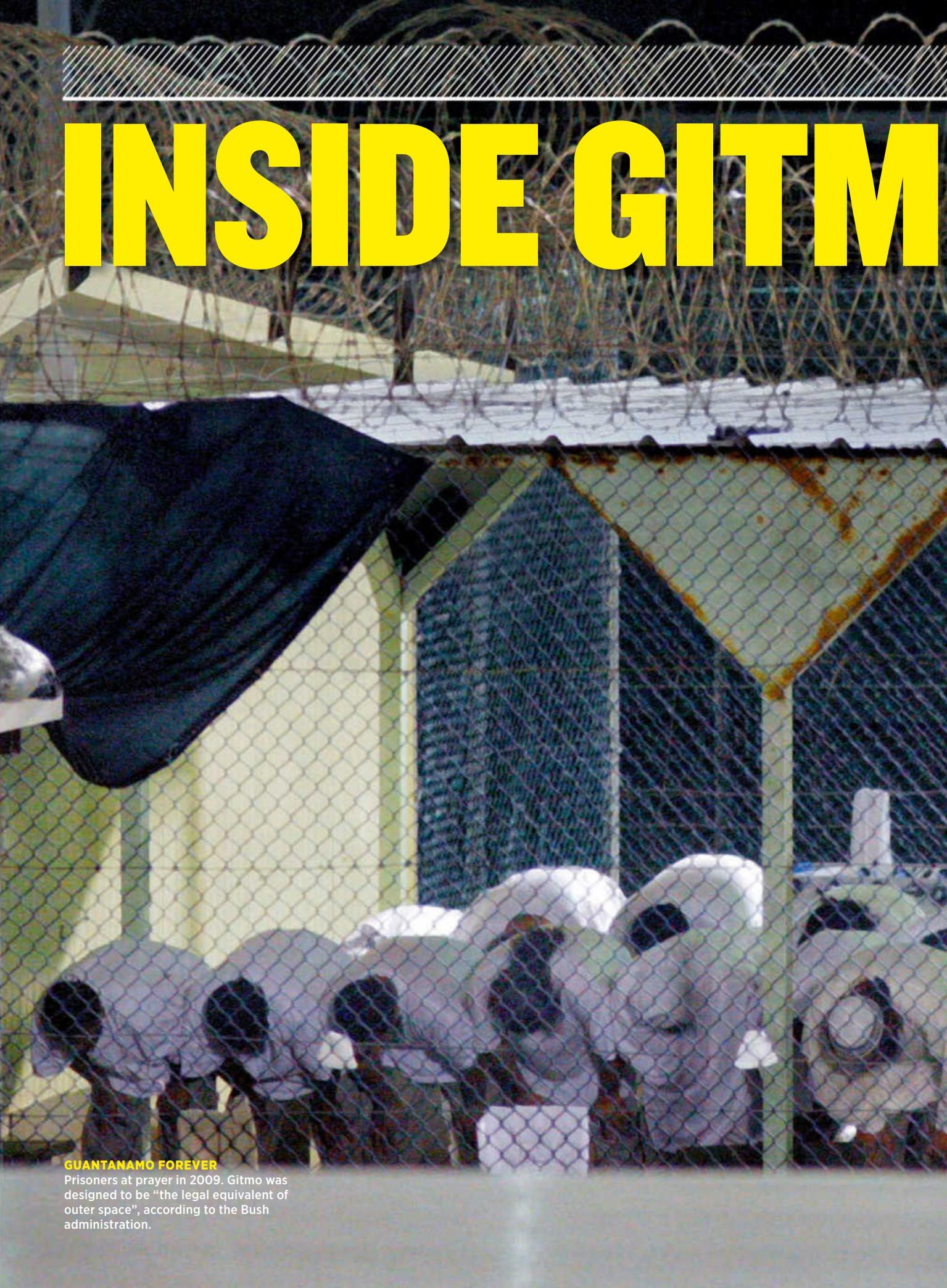
For a guy who grew up with a subscription to this magazine, however, *Vinyl* hits closer to home. A teenage Cannavale gravitated to many of the New York artists who are featured in *Vinyl*, from Lou Reed to the New York Dolls (he even got to hang out with Dolls singer David Johansen to prepare for the series). "[My character] runs a massive corporation like an artist, you know?" he says. "It's just about this guy trying to figure out how to remain an artist."

Which, as luck would have it, is something Cannavale has discussed with none other than Pacino, who did finally come see him in a show, after which Cannavale was cast to play his son in *Danny Collins*. The two became fast friends ("He's the best texter," Cannavale says. "He loves exclamation points and capital letters"). But as *Vinyl* attests, having an artist's soul in a tough's body isn't easy: If Cannavale's recent roles have an underlying current, it's one of vulnerability, a sense that they might be hard as nails on the outside, but there's something crumbling within. "A character should always have a secret," says Cannavale. "I feel like we all do." 



Cannavale at  
Cafe Reggio  
in New York's  
West Village  
in January

# INSIDE GITM



## GUANTANAMO FOREVER

Prisoners at prayer in 2009. Gitmo was designed to be "the legal equivalent of outer space", according to the Bush administration.

# O AMERICA'S SHAME

BY JANET REITMAN



## AMERICAN GULAG

U.S. military guards transfer a captive in 2010. As of December 2015, the island held 107 prisoners, at an annual cost of \$3.4 million per person.



**T**HE 9/11 TRIAL will, if it happens at all, take place on a patch of dust in the Caribbean, within a high-security facility you can enter only with a notebook and pen (and just one pen), and observe from behind a wall of triple-thick glass. Anyone who wishes to attend will have to

first be approved by the Pentagon's Office of Military Commissions, the entity in charge of the offshore war court at Guantanamo Bay. It takes three hours and 20 minutes to fly to Guantanamo via military charter from Andrews Air Force Base. A 20-minute ferry ride then takes visitors from Gitmo's airport across the bay to Camp Justice, an almost \$12 million tent city built on an abandoned airstrip and housing the heavily fortified maze of trailers, fences and concertina wire known as the "Expeditionary Legal Complex", or ELC, where proceedings are held in a prefab building known as Courtroom II. During proceedings, every word that is spoken is heard in the visitor's gallery after being filtered through speakers on a 40-second delay, which enables a judge to ensure nothing classified slips out. There are no laptops, phones or recording devices allowed in the ELC, and no cameras. Also: no sleeveless shirts or open-toed shoes.

This fortress, which will be disassembled and shipped back stateside if and when Guantanamo ever closes, was constructed in 2008 to try the military's "high-value prisoners", of which there are currently 14, only five of whom – accused 9/11 mastermind Khalid Sheikh Mohammed and his four co-plotters – arguably matter to most Americans. Hearings for the "9/11 Five" can be dramatic events, during which the accused have spontaneously knelt on the floor and prayed, and engaged in other acts of open defiance, requesting during

Contributing editor JANET REITMAN wrote about Vladimir Putin's leadership in Russia in RS 752.

their 2012 arraignment, for example, that the entire 87-page charge sheet be read aloud, a process that took almost three hours. At the start of this same hearing, defendant Walid bin Attash was wheeled into the court in restraints, minus his prosthetic leg. Only after bin Attash "promised to stay on his best behaviour" was the fake leg reattached.

On September 21st, 2015, about 40 members of the mobile war court convened at Camp Justice for pretrial hearings in the case of Abd al Hadi al Iraqi, an alleged Taliban commander and Al Qaeda leader who virtually no one has ever heard of, and who had nothing to do with 9/11 or any other spectacular act of terrorism. This makes him far more representative of the majority of Guantanamo's inmates, all largely anonymous figures who may or may not have terrorist ties, but wound up at Gitmo after fighting with the Taliban, or simply being in the wrong place at the wrong time. A former Iraqi Army soldier who fled to Afghanistan in 1991, Hadi is accused of traditional war crimes, leading attacks on U.S. troops in Afghanistan between 2002 and 2004, among them.

This January will begin the 15th year since the first prisoners of the War on Terror – who the U.S. government referred to then, as now, as "detainees" – began arriving at this scrubby and perpetually broiling U.S.-controlled naval base on the southeast coast of Cuba. Of the 780 original captives, 538 were released by President Bush before he left office. Though President Obama, who has released 135 men, has said he intends to close Guantanamo before he leaves office, as of this writing, 107 prisoners remain interned on the island, at an annual per-inmate cost of roughly \$3.4 million. The annual cost of housing an inmate at a federal or military prison, by contrast, is about \$78,000. Forty-eight men have been cleared for release, many of them during the Bush administration. Forty-nine are in the purgatorial state known as "indefinite detention", including roughly 30 men the government says cannot be tried but are too dangerous to release. Just 10 prisoners, all "high value", a euphemism for those formerly imprisoned by the CIA, are facing legal proceedings. Three have already been convicted,

two with guilty pleas. Seven are currently on trial, though the prosecution of the alleged mastermind of the *USS Cole* bombing has been frozen indefinitely, and the 9/11 trial has been mired in delays since the men were arraigned in 2012.

It's 10 a.m., and Hadi al Iraqi's hearing was supposed to start more than a half-hour ago. The proceedings are being held up, we're told, due to a "closed session", which could take a half-hour, or an hour, or the whole day. A few dozen people, many of them members of Joint Task Force Guantanamo, the military unit in charge of both the war court and the detention operation, sit quietly in the gallery of the courtroom, where on the other side of the glass a slight



Arab man sits at the defense table wearing a white turban and matching *dishdasha*.

Hadi, who is in his mid-fifties, seems almost relaxed, stroking his dark-grey beard and chatting with his translator. He has been at Gitmo for more than eight years. His lawyers consider him to be a "prisoner of war" – and by most conventional standards he is, though the Bush administration believed that officially referring to their captives as such would entitle them to the corresponding Geneva Convention protections. Instead, Hadi, like all Gitmo prisoners, is called an "unprivileged enemy belligerent" – indicating a fighter who, while a member of an organised armed force, is not covered by the standard in-

ternational protocols as he does not wear a uniform or carry his weapon openly and is thus classified as "unprivileged". As a detainee, the Department of Defense can in theory hold him forever. According to a recent JTF-GTMO Fact Sheet, "detention of unprivileged enemy belligerents... [is] not an act of punishment".

Today, the war court is meeting so that Hadi can fire his lawyers. He's had four teams of attorneys since 2012, two of which were reassigned by the government against his wishes. Hadi doesn't explain why he wants to replace his current team, but a general distrust of the system is likely part of it. "And who can blame him?" says one of his former attorneys. "Imag-

ine if you'd been picked up by Al Qaeda, taken to a secret Al Qaeda prison and kept there incomunicado for six months, then flown to the other side of the world to an Al Qaeda Gitmo where they gave you an Al Qaeda lawyer to represent you. Think you'd have much faith in the system?"

At 10:45, the hearing finally comes to order and is over in 45 minutes. "Your right to counsel does not include, according to case law, a 'meaningful relationship' between yourself and your counsel – you don't have to like them," the judge lectures, before granting his request. When the judge remarks on how many lawyers Hadi has had in his years in Gitmo, Hadi, who has retained his composure throughout,

# "IMAGINE IF YOU'D BEEN PICKED UP BY AL QAEDA AND FLOWN TO THEIR GITMO — THINK YOU'D HAVE FAITH IN THE SYSTEM?"

stands up and calmly states that he has been waiting for his case to go to trial for more than six years. "It took a whole year for the government to bring charges," he says through a translator. "Then they were changed, and my meetings with my defense were spied on. All the delay that happened in the past wasn't because of me."

Hadi offers no explanation about how he knows his meetings were spied on, and the judge doesn't ask. It's seemingly just one of an endless series of controversial, yet essentially peripheral, issues facing the war court, which has yet to address either the facts or the merits of the case, though it has addressed a wide variety of other topics over the years, ranging from whether the accused can wear camouflage vests in court to which shadowy government entity controls the hidden censor button. "In 2009, we had three full days of argument back and forth about what we do if the client says, 'I don't want to come to court,'" says the ACLU's Denny LeBoeuf, one of Khalid Sheikh Mohammed's attorneys.

More recently, there have been allegations that the government read the 9/11 defense attorneys' e-mails and listened in on attorney-client conferences through a device disguised as a smoke detector. (In a lengthy response, the Department of Defense denied all of these allegations.) During one recent set of 9/11 hearings, an attorney for one of the defendants said she couldn't advise her client of his rights "because I frankly don't know what they are." The judge didn't seem to be sure either.

**T**HERE'S THESE SORT OF ABSURDITIES that make you wonder if the military commissions, and Guantanamo overall, is by now nothing more than an elaborate theatre piece. "If Abraham Lincoln rode down there on a unicorn, I don't think I'd even think twice," says Navy Cmdr. Brian Mizer, a military defense attorney best known for representing Osama bin Laden's driver, Salim Hamdan, before the military commissions in 2008. "It's become such a toxic farce. The people there are just following orders, and their orders are to ride it out until it collapses."

That collapse was supposed to have occurred six years ago, when President Obama, who'd made closing Guantanamo

a centrepiece of his 2008 campaign, signed an executive order on his second day in office, January 22nd, 2009, instructing the military to close Guantanamo by the end of that year. At Camp Justice, 9/11 attorneys who'd been preparing for trial heard the news and threw a party, at one point forming a drunken conga line. But with Obama confronted by stiff Republican opposition and a slew of other priorities, including the battle over the Affordable Care Act and scaling down the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the fate of a few hundred Muslim men was pushed to the back burner. One proposal, to shut down Guantanamo by moving inmates to a supermax-style prison the administration was planning to build in Illinois, was quietly shelved after Obama's own liberal base opposed the idea of creating a "Guantanamo North".

This past November, the Obama administration was expected to release a long-awaited plan to close Guantanamo, which would involve resettling low-risk inmates in other countries, while bringing the remaining group to the United States. The current scenario reportedly includes a number of civilian and military detention options, including the possibility of building a brand-new facility, but as of December, the White House had still not released its blueprint. On December 1st, 2015, the *Wall Street Journal* reported the administration had rejected the Pentagon's cost estimates to move and maintain inmates in the U.S., which could run as high as \$600 million. Gary Ross, a Pentagon spokesman, tells me the administration is still working on ways to "safely and responsibly" close Gitmo.

Since 2010, Congress, however, has opposed all proposals to bring the Guantanamo prisoners to the U.S. In November, Speaker of the House Paul Ryan boasted of a veto-proof majority and claimed Obama "doesn't have the authority" to close the base. The most recent National Defense Authorization Act, a \$607 billion defense-spending bill, not only bans using federal funds to transfer and house the prisoners in the U.S., but also bans sending them to Syria, Libya, Yemen and Somalia.

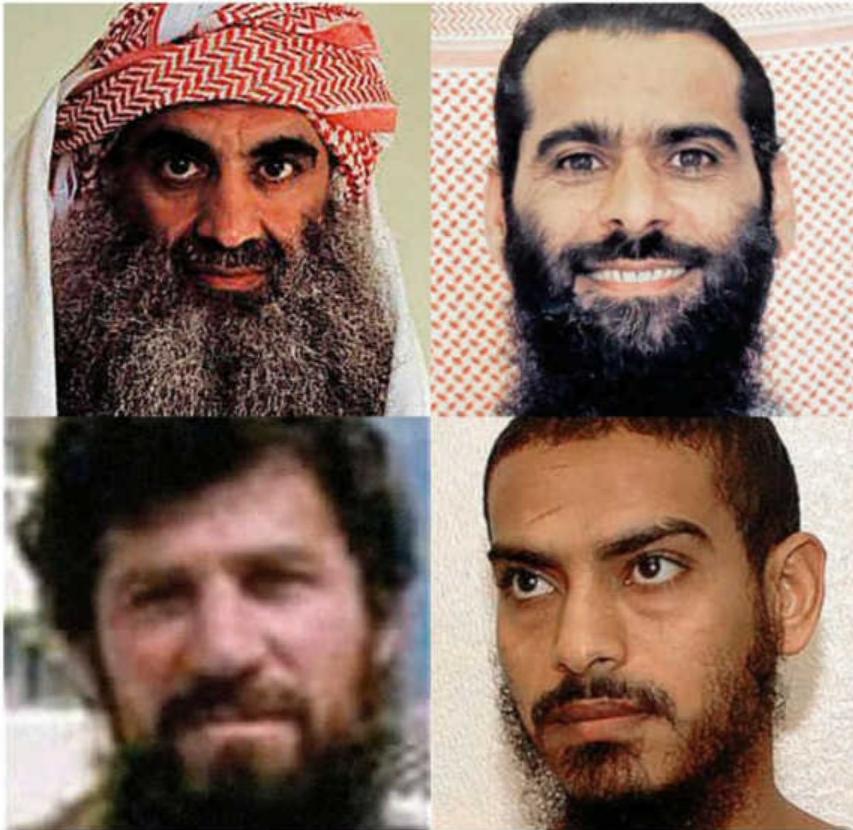
Though the president could still attempt to close Guantanamo through executive order, the administration now seems to be

more focused on reducing the number of prisoners, which would make it easier to bring those remaining few to the U.S. Any project of this nature will have to begin with the 48 men who have already been cleared by a multi-agency review panel, says former State Department official Clifford Sloan, who negotiated transfers with countries from Uruguay to Slovakia during his 2013-2015 stint as the Special Envoy for Guantanamo Closure. Most of these men, he notes, were approved for transfer in 2009, if not even earlier — one inmate recently transferred was approved in 2004. "It's a very serious problem for our country that we have had people at Guantanamo for 14 years who were approved for transfer six years ago or longer," he says. "Every person who has been approved needs to be transferred promptly, because every month we aren't seeing transfers seriously undermines the president's policy."

As of December, the State Department has transfer deals in the works for the prisoners cleared by the review panel. These arrangements are all in different stages of the negotiating process, but they could potentially be worked out for all of the men by early 2016. Among the transfer requirements is that Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter sign off on the deals, which, as of this writing, he hadn't done for 17 men currently in the pipeline, in part due to new congressional regulations that now need to be addressed. But the upshot of these delays, note both officials and attorneys for the prisoners, is that the transfers are thwarted by inaction.

"The dysfunction and obstacles that are put in the path of implementing this [transfer] policy are incredible," one administration official tells me. "I know for a fact that there are people working on this issue within the government who are ideologically opposed to closing the facility. And there are a thousand ways that you can thwart policy through bureaucratic cunning or inaction, like when transfer packages just sit there on the defense secretary's desk and don't move. Or that the people in the building don't get it to him."

And yet, even if the administration does manage to speed up transfers and close the prison, it will not be able to shutter Guantanamo, which by now is less of a



#### THE ACCUSED

Clockwise from top left: Khalid Sheikh Mohammed; Muhammed Rahim al-Afghani; Mustafa al-Shamiri (who has been held for 13 years under mistaken identity) and Abd al Hadi al Iraqi

place than a metaphor for all of the post-9/11 national-security policies that have made the so-called global War on Terror intractable. "You don't pick up people and bring them to an island prison and decide you're going to figure out what to do with them later," says George Clarke, who has represented six Gitmo inmates. "And yet it happened. And we've continued to detain people that didn't do anything to deserve being detained for 14 years – not only that, we built an entire structure to institutionalise this policy."

"The president knows that Guantanamo is wrong, legally and morally," says Wells Dixon, senior attorney for the Center for Constitutional Rights, who has represented clients at Gitmo since 2005. "But the failure to ensure accountability for the sins of the prior administration is like trying to avoid treatment for mental illness with the hope that it will go away," he says. "The more you ignore it, the more it comes back to haunt you."

**I**N ORDER TO COVER GUANTANAMO, you must agree to become a captive of the U.S. military. This begins with what can be a 45-day vetting process that includes providing the military with a professional biography, a description of one's news organisation and a signed 13-page media-ground-rules document, most of it oriented around "protected information". This, as it's defined, is not just classified material, but anything that if disclosed could "be expected to cause damage to the national security". Failure

to comply can result in one being kicked off the island.

These sorts of rules are fairly typical in any embed situation (during the war in Iraq, the media ground rules I signed were just seven pages long, however), but Guantanamo differs from most in that it's an embed in a weird suburbia where no one is actually at war. The U.S. Naval Station Guantanamo Bay, as it's called, is America's oldest overseas naval installation, home to 6,000 U.S. military-service personnel and contractors, who live and work in what looks like a small American town, circa 1982. There are tidy suburban-style subdivisions, a school, a church, three Subways, a Walmart-style supermarket, an open-air movie theatre and a gym. In their off-hours, Guantanamo's military personnel can go snorkelling and scuba diving. They can visit the souvenir shop to load up on iguana plush toys, or Gitmo-themed shot glasses, or tank tops with mottoes like, "It don't GTMO better than this!"

That Guantanamo, which the 2,100 members of the JTF also inhabit, has nothing to do with the Guantanamo of the detention camps and the war court, both of which reside in isolated pockets of the base and have so little to do with the larger naval station that they might as well be on the moon. Indeed, the Bush administration considered Guantanamo "the legal equivalent of outer space", as one White House official put it: an extrajudicial no man's land to detain, interrogate and ultimately try the "worst of the worst". By 2003, as then-Secretary of Defense Don-

ald Rumsfeld would himself concede in a letter to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the administration was aware that most of the men they'd rounded up were at best low-level foot soldiers – many of them not "captured on the battlefield", as the JTF continues to assert, but, like Hadi al Iraqi, captured hundreds of kilometres away by foreign governments, or sold by Afghan and Pakistani tribesmen for \$5,000 bounty payments the U.S. had widely advertised. Yet for years the Bush administration would maintain that the men possessed valuable intelligence, and even now, the Pentagon insists that Gitmo "remains a key intelligence resource".

A crucial part of the Gitmo experience is the generally agreed-upon fiction that for whatever else might be going on at the base – soccer games, scuba trips, a screening of *Straight Outta Compton* – Guantanamo remains an "integral component of Operation Enduring Freedom". This narrative begins immediately upon arriving at Camp Justice, which looks like a forward operating base in, say, Baquba or Kandahar, except it's in the Caribbean. There are rows of canvas tents where some members of the war court, and all of the media and human rights observers who accompany them, sleep. But where most FOBs bustle with activity, much of Camp Justice feels, and looks, like a parking lot, if one with an overabundance of RESTRICTED AREA and NO PHOTOGRAPHY signs. Everywhere you look are barriers: metal barriers, interlocking plastic barriers, even Hesco barriers, those sand-or-dirt-filled canvas barrels that are ubiquitous in war zones – a few, I notice, have become planters.

"Operational Security," I am told by a very bored-looking sergeant tasked with providing a media orientation, "is not censorship." He explains, reading from a PowerPoint slide, that OPSEC, a fundamental element of Gitmo protocol, is "a risk-assessment process used to deny an adversary critical information about our operations". This bans photographing any security features, including cameras, power generators, fences, locks, ships docked at piers, as well as the labyrinth-like ELC; and a mysterious hilltop building known as the Bunker, which, with its varied array of antennas shooting from

# ONE PRISONER HAS LEARNED ENGLISH, BECOME A FAN OF 'LITTLE HOUSE ON THE PRAIRIE' AND DESIGNED A FARM IN YEMEN.

the roof, looks like a listening post, though no one seems to know its purpose – military public-affairs minders give me a blank stare when I ask.

These security measures, along with the posters encouraging soldiers to USE OPSEC EVERY DAY and DON'T BE A SPY, TURN ONE IN, only further reinforce the sense of Camp Justice as a hermetically sealed, if fake, combat zone, which is required to legitimise the military commissions, an equally bogus “battlefield” court. With the exception of Hadi al Iraqi, in fact, the commissions haven’t yet focused on actual war crimes. Instead, almost every one of the accused has been charged with “providing material support for terrorism”, which Congress declared to be a war crime in 2006, years after the men in these cases were said to have committed them. The Constitution itself bars Congress from criminalising anything retroactively, so nearly every case that’s been won in Gitmo has later been overturned in federal court. “They’ve managed zero convictions that aren’t guilty pleas in 15 years,” says Mizer. “To the extent that that’s impressive to anyone, that’s a very impressive record.”

“What’s important to understand about Guantanamo is not so much that it’s ‘outside the law’, as laws and policies have been tailored to legitimise completely illegitimate practices, often after the fact,” says Karen Greenberg, director of Fordham Law School’s Center on National Security and author of the upcoming *Rogue Justice: The Making of the Security State*, an account of the transformation of American justice after 9/11. “And to this day, the issues basic to American law – including fair and timely trials and a ban on abusive treatment in custody – have been supplanted by newer policies, buttressed by newer laws, which are politicised and subject to change. All of that turns Guantanamo into a living museum of what it means to break the law by rewriting it.”

The government’s attempt to “legalise” Guantanamo began in the wake of *Hamdan v. Rumsfeld*, the 2006 Supreme Court decision that found the Bush administration had exceeded its executive authority in detaining men at Guantanamo without due process. To attempt to rectify the situation, Bush proposed, and Congress

passed, the Military Commissions Act of 2006, which created a system for holding, charging and trying “unlawful enemy combatants”, a category virtually unheard of in military law, giving them little to no legal protections while also shielding the administration from accountability for their prior actions, including torture.

Obama denounced the military commissions on the campaign trail, but as president decided not to abolish them. Instead, the administration came up with reforms, contained in the Military Commissions Act of 2009, which ostensibly brought the flawed war court in line with the rule of law. The act changed the Bush-era term “unlawful enemy combatants” to “unlawful enemy belligerents”, who were now given a guaranteed right to counsel. The new policy also banned evidence obtained by torture and limited the use of hearsay evidence to what the government could prove was “reliable”.

That hearsay was at all considered admissible evidence, though, was a wholesale rewriting of laws that have always banned hearsay evidence in any American civilian or military court. “Just to give you an example, the government is going to use 83 hearsay statements in the *USS Cole* case, some from people who are dead,” Mizer says, almost mystified. “No court in the U.S. would ever sign off on that.”

The official charged with bolstering these policies is the commissions’ chief prosecutor, Brig. Gen. Mark Martins, who Obama appointed to revive the floundering war court in 2011. A tall, hawkish-looking man with impeccable military bearing, who attended Harvard Law School at the same time as Obama, Martins has been one of the most forceful defenders of the military commissions. He signed on to prosecute Khalid Sheikh Mohammed after the Obama administration, succumbing to political pressure, withdrew its plans to try the 9/11 Five in Manhattan federal court.

“Let me emphasise that charges are only allegations,” Martins notes during one briefing, reminding me and two other reporters that, as would be true in any courtroom in the country, the Gitmo accused, including Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, are “presumed innocent until proven guilty”. It is also true that under the laws of war, Mo-

hammed will never be freed, even on the remote chance that he is acquitted. Martins acknowledges that this throws into question whether the system has any legitimacy, “because is the trial really worth something if it doesn’t mean someone is going to go free?” but then tries to explain that, as Justice Robert Jackson, who led the prosecution of Nazi war criminals at Nuremberg, once said, a meaningful trial “has to have consequences either way”.

In addition to being chief prosecutor, Martins is also the commissions’ chief propagandist, a thankless task, given that, as he himself acknowledges, “None of our systems have yet been capable of holding a trial.” And yet, “there is value in just doing the process with rigour”, he insists. “The rigour of taking this on every day is what gives legitimacy to the whole system.”

If Martins does believe the system is legitimate, he may be the only one. “The last thing I’d want to do would be to prosecute these cases,” says retired Navy Lt. Cmdr. Kevin Bogucki, a longtime military prosecutor who spent eight years as a military-commissions defense lawyer before retiring in 2015. “These guys have no authority.”

“I think Gen. Martins does his best to put up a facade, but everyone thinks it’s a joke,” says Carlos Warner, a federal public defender who represents a number of Gitmo clients, though none the government intends to put on trial, though he’d love the chance. “I’ve told some of those lawyers that if I could represent one of their clients I would make it the kangaroo court it is. Like, we would show up wearing Bermuda shorts. I would never do that in federal court. But they’re not controlled by the CIA.”

The role of U.S. intelligence agencies in the commissions has been an underlying theme since 2013, when it appeared during one of the 9/11 hearings that outside censors cut the audio on the closed-circuit broadcast, incensing Judge Pohl, who had no idea who’d pushed the button. The following year, pretrial hearings were stalled when defense lawyers found out that an FBI agent had asked a member of their team to become a government informant.

In February 2015, there was yet another recess in pretrial hearings after both bin al Shibh and his co-defendant, Walid bin



Attash, stood up after the court was called to order and identified a translator as a former CIA linguist who'd assisted in their torturous interrogations. The government didn't deny that the translator had once been employed at a CIA prison.

Torture, which one 9/11 attorney refers to as "Guantanamo's original sin", defines every aspect of the war court. The government's efforts to cover up the torture of men like Khalid Sheikh Mohammed or his co-defendant, Mustafa al-Hasawi, who was subjected to "rectal rehydration" by the CIA and now can only sit on a pillow, has led to rules unlike those of any other court in the modern history of the United States. Any piece of paper going into an attorney-client meeting is vetted for "informational contraband". Every person in the war court, including translators and transcribers, must have a top-secret security clearance. Discovery material, which is typically shared between the prosecution and the defense, is given to defense attorneys only at the government's discretion.

As much of the material is classified, the accused are unable to see it, nor are their attorneys able to discuss it with them, even if that evidence pertains to their clients' own experience.

"Until recently, we were told if any of the details of the torture were made public, it would cause grave damage to national security," says David Nevin, Mohammed's lead counsel. "Before that, we were told that if any of the *words* of our client were let out, it would cause great damage to national security. At one point, I asked them, 'So if he says he likes peanut butter, that's classified?' With a straight face, they said yes."

Mohammed's and his fellow accused's thoughts are no longer classified, but the details of what happened to them are, even after the release of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence's torture report, in December 2014. "Now it's down to who did the torturing and where the torturing was done," says Nevin. "You have this cascade of layer upon layer of secrecy. It's an absurd

#### TALK IS CHEAP

A prisoner communicates with another detainee who's still inside his cell.

situation. Think about someone having something inflicted on them, and therefore they possess classified information – their memories are classified, they are owned by the United States government."

**D**YSFUNCTION OF THE COMMISSIONS aside, it could be argued that the men facing the war court are the lucky ones – they get to be tried. As of this writing, there are 97 men who will never see the inside of a courtroom, let alone be charged with a crime. Six have been there since the prison opened in 2002. These prisoners are the larger and, in many ways, more important story of Guantanamo, though they are also the ones Americans tend to forget. The government has helped significantly in this process by staffing Gitmo with a majority of National Guard and reserve troops on nine-month rotations, who've been programmed to see the men in their charge as not only dangerous but guilty.

The presumption of guilt, a pattern established by the Bush administration, was relatively unchanged even with the introduction of a special review process the White House began in 2009 to determine who each prisoner was and what it should do with them. Lawrence Wilkerson, who was the chief of staff to Secretary of State Colin Powell, notes that beyond the Bush administration's recognition that many of the men in their custody were innocent, a pattern of negligence with regard to intelligence made it impossible for the Obama White House to know who was who. "The Obama administration had to accept what they inherited, which was not much: corrupt evidence, corrupt chain of custody, torture-obtained 'evidence', bribe-obtained evidence, word of mouth, and abysmal record keeping, to mention only a bit," Wilkerson says. "They had an impossible task, so they just told the bureaucracy to clean it up. And that's what has been going on since mid-2009. No one really knows who is guilty a lot, who is guilty a little and who is totally innocent – not in any way that would stand up in court and, I am tempted to say, not in any way, period."

Nonetheless, the message that all of the men in custody are in some way criminals

# "THE NIGHT PRESIDENT OBAMA WAS ELECTED, THE DETAINEES STARTED CHANTING HIS NAME — AND IT FREAKED THE GUARDS OUT."

is reinforced up the chain of command to officials with far more access to the prisoners' records than their troops. "I'm not in the business of deciding guilt or innocence... [but] I firmly believe that these guys were doing things they shouldn't have been doing, and that got them put in here," says Col. David Heath, commander of the Joint Detention Group, which oversees prison operations. Heath also tells me that he fully supports the president's plan to close Guantanamo and that "under appropriate security conditions", Americans have nothing to fear from bringing the inmates to the U.S. "However, I have a responsibility to continue to run the facility until someone tells me to put them on an airplane and send them somewhere else."

**F**OR REASONS THAT, LIKE MOST things at Guantanamo, are never made clear, journalists who come to Gitmo to cover a commission hearing are not allowed to also tour the camps. Instead, you have to leave Guantanamo and then come back again, having filled out the same mountain of forms and agreeing to the same media ground rules, this time travelling via a private charter out of Fort Lauderdale, Florida, to the same lonely airstrip, taking the same ferry and meeting up with the same media escorts, who will keep such close tabs on your behaviour that if mine could have followed me to the bathroom, they would have.

I revisit Gitmo in early October, about a week after I returned from Camp Justice, and this time I'm put up in a townhouse on one of the base's suburban-style streets. Each morning for the next two days, I'm picked up by one of my four JTF minders, all National Guard troops in their twenties, and driven by van to a secluded, dusty enclave on the southeast corner of the base that some journalists have taken to calling the Detention Centre Zone. Hidden over the hills, the Zone is the JTF's private fiefdom: a base within a base, with its own dining facility, movie theatre, minimart, mental-health facility, chapel and even a recreation area where MPs, stressed out from their 12-hour shifts on the prison blocks, can sit in massage chairs or play with therapy dogs. Some of the soldiers live

in a trailer park known as Camp America and ride around in Humvees – "patrolling for the Al Qaeda invasion", one journalist cynically notes. Like the ubiquitous Hesco barriers, Humvees are wholly unnecessary, but in the War on Terror mindset of the Zone, you can never be too careful.

A deep insecurity bordering on paranoia seems to infect the Guantanamo guard force, which bills itself as "the model organisation for safe and humane enemy combatant detention operations", working, according to its website, "under the watchful gaze of the Nation and the world". A JTF slogan, "Safe, Humane, Legal, Transparent", is written on all of its official signs, documents, beer mugs. And yet the chief public-affairs officer, Navy Capt. Chris Scholl, knows it's probably no use. "You guys are going to write what you're going to write, and most of what you write is negative," he says over lunch with me and David Jones, a journalist from the *Daily Mail* who Scholl seems to particularly dislike – in a prior story, Jones referred to Gitmo as a "gulag".

If there are parts of the Detention Zone that could be called a gulag, we won't see that stuff. Journalists and congressional delegations are given a sanitised version of the Guantanamo Experience, in which our military hosts, briefed that journalists, like their captives (and their captives' lawyers), are in one way or another the enemy, will try to come across as open and accommodating, in the spirit of "transparency", while remaining totally opaque.

The first stop on this Potemkin Village tour is the prison hospital, a series of large trailerlike buildings where, as will be true throughout the Zone, most of those in military uniform are nameless. Instead, in a nod to the dangerous terrorists in their midst, they have blank name tags, or numbers. "I'm sure you're aware of some of the threats out there," one lieutenant colonel from New Jersey tells me, explaining that their main concern isn't their own safety, but their families' back home. A guard later echoes that sentiment. "I've got a wife and kids," he says, adding he never wears his wedding ring while on duty. "I don't want these guys to know anything about me."

A sign in the hospital reads DETAINES IN THE VICINITY: MAINTAIN SILENCE,

which is odd, as the place seems empty. There are a few patients, we're told, but apparently nowhere near where we might go. There are, by contrast, 125 people in the Joint Medical Group, a staff-to-prisoner ratio of almost one-to-one.

The highlight of this tour, and really the only reason to take it, is a discussion of force-feeding, or as it's called in the Zone, "enteral feeding", which became an issue in 2013 when more than 60 per cent of Guantanamo's prison population went on hunger strike, a form of protest the military has dubbed "asymmetrical warfare".

"Or maybe they're so depressed by the fact that they've been cleared for transfer since 2006 and aren't being transferred that they'd rather be dead than remain in Guantanamo," says CCR's Wells Dixon, whose organisation represents Tariq Ba Odah, who has been on hunger strike for eight years. He weighs 35 kilograms.

Enteral feeding is broadly considered a form of torture by physicians' groups, and for several years a number of Guantanamo attorneys have been pressing the government to release 11 hours of video footage of former inmate Abu Wa'el Dhiab's force-feeding, which a federal judge ordered released in 2014. Three separate commanders at Guantanamo have testified that releasing that information could "cause harm to national security" and have classified the tapes at the "secret" level.

The military doctors explain that inmates are allowed to starve themselves until they've lost 15 per cent of their body weight, become dehydrated or show signs of organ failure, at which point the standard operating procedure requires the prisoner to "opt to be enterally fed as part of their peaceful protest". Given that they've already opted not to eat, it's unclear what is optional about being compelled to receive sustenance, but I suspect it's more about how they choose to get it – by walking peacefully to the medical facility to be administered a feeding tube through the nose or by being dragged from their cell and strapped into a chair. Side effects from long-term enteral feeding include chronic constipation and stomach paralysis. In Ba Odah's case, his body has begun to reject the nasal feeds. These issues are handled "professionally", the medical staff insists.



There are currently fewer than 10 men receiving nasal feedings, we're told, but who can really be sure: The military stopped releasing data on force-feeding in December 2013. "We decided for operational reasons not to release it," one of the medical officers says. "We're trying to do the best thing for the detainee's health."

Being on the "feed list" is a sign of "non-compliance", which is discussed during a brief walk-through of Camp Five, Gitmo's maximum-security prison, where some 40 to 50 mostly noncompliant inmates are held. We see none of them, however. Instead, eight military officials, most of them officers, accompany me and the *Daily Mail* through an empty cellblock where we are shown a "single-person cell", which by any other name would be solitary confinement, except that solitary, like "prisoner" or "force-feeding", is not a word used at Guantanamo. Each cell is nine square metres, with a long sliver of window the width of a Bic pen, and contains a concrete bed slab with a thin foam mattress, a stainless-steel toilet/sink contraption and two clothes hooks, designed to hold up to 18 kilograms, which, we're informed, was done so that it would be impossible to hang oneself from them.

Prisoners in Camp Five are monitored by two guards who patrol the block, checking in on their captives every one to three minutes. They receive their food through a slot in their door known as a "splash box". Splashing, it is explained, is another act of protest, accomplished when an inmate fills up a water bottle or Styrofoam cup with feces, urine, blood, vomit or some other

#### IN CHAINS

A prisoner is shackled at Gitmo. "In most cases, there is no evidence a detainee committed a crime other than the word of another detainee," says lawyer Tom Wilner.

bodily fluid and attempts to throw that on the guards "to show their displeasure with the policies". The officer giving the tour points to the soundproof foam on the ceiling, which is dotted with what looks like dried shit. "That's the remnant of a splashing event right there," he says, explaining that the tiling is impossible to clean.

Virtually everything is put in the splash box: food, water, changes of clothes, books. This gives the guards almost no physical contact with the inmate. I ask one young soldier, who in his non-Gitmo life is a prison guard at Fort Lewis, Washington, if there is anything unique about the inmates from his perspective. "I make a point not to know anything about them," he says, eight months into a nine-month tour.

The tour is exhausting and frustrating, and utterly pointless in many ways other than to serve what I come to believe is its central purpose: to blight out the existence of the prisoners. And yet, they exist. For a brief 15 minutes, we are allowed to glimpse them, behind one-way glass, while touring Camp Six, a medium-security prison where "highly compliant detainees" live in communal blocks. A couple of men dressed in ragged-looking clothes shuffle around, most wearing headphones to listen to the large TV posted above them. One older man in a prayer cap sits at a table leafing through a thick book. In a small gated

area, two masked guards stand with a book cart, gingerly handing books to men who reach for them through the bars. The effect is like watching animals at a zoo.

Our request to observe evening prayers, or morning prayers, is denied. So are requests to talk to the language teachers, art therapists, individual counsellors or any other personnel who have meaningful interaction with the detainees. The reason is the vague "policy", which I begin to understand is itself a form of newspeak in a place where the vast number of inmates are being held without charge, many having been cleared for release long ago, with no idea when or if they might be released. When confronted with these points, Scholl once again insists that this is a policy question that should be best taken up in Washington. "All I can tell you is that the care of the detainees has been probably really, really great under any law of war-detainee program," he says. "If you're in Camp Six, you can't walk out the door, [but] you can watch anything on TV. Any time, free."

These kinds of conversations or non-conversations happen throughout the day, and after a while, I begin to wonder, is Gitmo the most wilfully ignorant place I've ever been, or is it even worse than that? Surely the inability to answer even the simplest of questions in a straightforward manner, if at all, isn't incapacity, it's refusal. The result of this, though, is that the Detention Centre Zone has become a banal, no-thinking bubble, exactly the mentality needed to maintain the status quo. "You can't have kids understanding the background of this place because it would be



very hard for them to do their jobs," says attorney George Clarke, a former Marine.

The last stop on the tour is Camp X-Ray, the infamous, long-closed internment site where Gitmo's earliest prisoners were held. This is a highlight of the tour because it is the place most associated with Gitmo, but, as our minders stress, it was open for only 92 days. During that time, the prisoners lived in dog cages, and the dogs that helped to guard them lived in air-conditioned kennels. "The only guys out here with air conditioning were the dogs," a sergeant says, reciting a script that stresses even the interrogators were uncomfortable in the heat.

Camp X-Ray is overgrown now, with tangled vines creeping across the cages. And yet there is still an awfulness about it. The interrogation sheds, in particular, remind me of Abu Ghraib, which I mention to the sergeant, who isn't sure what I'm talking about. Guantanamo was the incubator for the abusive interrogation policies that would be exported first to places like Bagram and Abu Ghraib, and then to detention zones throughout the world. The sergeant was 10 when this occurred. "They told us about Abu Ghraib during training," he says. "The one thing they kind of hit on over and over is 'Don't take pictures'."

**T**HE NIGHT OBAMA WAS elected," says the *Miami Herald's* Carol Rosenberg, "the detainees started chanting 'Obama, Obama, Obama', and it freaked the guards out." Rosenberg, an incisive and dogged reporter who's been covering Guantanamo since 2002, delights in these bits of colour. "It took me three trips to get that," she says.

Rosenberg is the doyenne of Gitmo: winner of numerous press freedom awards and a hero to countless lawyers and activists who see her as "Guantanamo's conscience", as Fordham Law's Karen Greenberg calls her, the holder of all the institutional memory of a place that otherwise lives and breathes plausible deniability. In 14 years, Rosenberg estimates, she's spent more than 1,000 nights at Guantanamo, covering the commissions, which she live-tweets, and reporting on the hunger strikes, suicides and quiet desperation

of the prisoners whose sagas she tracks in numerous stories, as well as an online record she maintains on the *Herald's* website. This meticulous recounting of numbers and facts tells a far darker, if more truthful, story of Guantanamo, breaking down the tremendous costs of maintaining the Detention Centre Zone and laying bare the inanity and futility of the war court.

Though many in the Pentagon respect her, the JTF approaches Rosenberg with a mix of fear and loathing, notably Scholl, who seems threatened by her immunity to military spin and relentless focus on issues he finds superfluous, such as where sources were on September 11th, 2001. "I promise you no one here thinks about 9/11," he says, even though 9/11 references are everywhere: from the Ground Zero paintball field to the gigantic American "Flag of Honour" portrait hanging in the lobby of the JTF Headquarters, whose stripes are made up of the names of every single person who was killed in the 9/11 attacks. In Gitmo's early days, new MPs were taken to Ground Zero before they started their tour.

"The entire reason for this place is 9/11," I tell Scholl.

"We don't dwell on it," he says.

This attempt at message management is tragic. Terrible and deeply un-American things happened at Guantanamo as a result of 9/11, which Rosenberg, along with the men she calls "captives", bore witness to. Though the abuse and brutal interrogations have ended, there is still the ongoing, if silent, torture of being interned without legal recourse at the end of the world. Gitmo exudes this sickening and unsettling reality. It is impossible to be anywhere within the Detention Zone, in particular, without being reminded that what the place is really all about, hidden from

public view and outside the realm of memory, is suffering.

One of the stories Rosenberg has covered extensively pertains to the endless purgatory of the subset of men known as "law of war" prisoners, or as she dubbed them in 2012, "forever prisoners", whose repeated description as "too dangerous to release" is what is driving much of the opposition to shuttering Guantanamo. The forever prisoners were known only by their inmate numbers until 2013, when Rosenberg filed a FOIA request to compel the government to release the names of the prisoners. But the allegations against them have largely remained shrouded in mystery, beyond government assertions that the men they continue to hold under the laws of war are "known" Al Qaeda operatives. "If you look at the evidence against these people, it's absolutely bullshit," says Tom Wilner, the attorney who was lead counsel on the landmark 2008 Supreme Court case *Boumediene v. Bush* that affirmed the right of Guantanamo prisoners to challenge their detention based on the government's evidence. "In most cases, there is no evidence that a detainee committed a crime or trained for terrorist activities other than the word of another detainee who may, himself, have been tortured, or who told his interrogators what they wanted to hear." Many of these informants have recanted, he says. "None of this would hold up in court. At best, it raises suspicions. And you cannot, in a democratic society, hold people based on suspicion."

In many cases, say Wilner and others, inmates have been put in indefinite detention based less on what they may have done before they arrived at Guantanamo than what they've said or done while there. Not surprisingly, some indefinite detainees



#### HAUNTED PAST

Left: A prisoner is escorted to interrogation in 2004. Right: Buildings stand empty at the now-closed Camp X-Ray in 2009. Gitmo's earliest inmates were held in dog cages.

have expressed hatred for Americans. One of Carlos Warner's clients, Mansoor Abdul Rahman al Dayfi, was kept in indefinite detention in part due to his rhetoric. Al Dayfi was one of the first prisoners to arrive at Guantanamo in 2002, profiled as having prior knowledge of the 9/11 attacks. In July 2015, a military-intelligence assessment concluded that he was "a low-level fighter who was aligned with Al Qaeda, although it is unclear whether he joined the group". Yet during his detention, the report notes, he "expressed support for terrorism".

"You have a lot of guys like that," says Warner. "Mansoor never should have been in Gitmo to begin with. But in 2007, he was going with the 'Fuck you guys, I'm going to kill as many Americans as possible', and so when he goes in front of a panel they go, 'Well, he's dangerous.' Well, yes, but he's also innocent."

In a March 2011 executive order, the White House created a parole-board-like system, known as Periodic Review Boards, to assess an inmate's continued threat level. This panel, convened by the Defense Department, was supposed to review each of the forever prisoners within a year. Instead, the PRB, for unspecified reasons, didn't have its first meeting until 2013. Since then, 19 men have been before the board; 16 of them, including al Dayfi, were found transferrable, with possibly no links to extremism or terrorism whatsoever.

One forever prisoner, Mustafa al-Shamiri, was held for 13 years under the belief that he was an Al Qaeda agent. In December 2015, al-Shamiri was granted a PRB hearing, during which the DOD acknowledged it had mistaken him for someone else.

Warner says some forever prisoners are dangerous. "The problem is the whole

group gets lumped together," he says. "The process is so opaque it's impossible to know whether or not these guys are innocent. All we know is they will never face trial and the government has acknowledged guilt cannot be proven, until things like al-Shamiri happen, and it's like, 'Whoops, wrong guy.'

A review of the cleared inmates' files shows that "compliance" is a factor in deciding who gets a review. Mansoor al-Dayfi, for instance, gave up his hostile rhetoric by 2010, learned English, became a fan of American pop culture, including *Little House on the Prairie*, and was one of the five designers of the Milk & Honey Project, a business plan for a self-sufficient farm in Yemen. Three of the five were granted PRBs; all were then put on the transfer list. "I encouraged Mansoor to use his time wisely," says Warner. "These are people. They're not animals."

Another one of Warner's clients, Muhammed Rahim al-Afghani, has a Plenty of Fish profile. Warner explains he set it up for Rahim, a multilingual forever prisoner interned at Camp Seven, as a sort of "Dada approach", given that everything at Guantanamo is irrational anyway. "Something has to make people pay attention," he says. "Sixty per cent of Democrats believe Guantanamo should remain open – that says we need to work on our message. If they begin to see Rahim as a human being, maybe they'll also pay attention to what happened to him."

Rahim was the last prisoner to arrive at Guantanamo, in March 2008, having spent approximately seven months in the CIA's secret network of prisons. There, according to the Senate report, he was subjected to a variety of abuses, including prolonged sleep deprivation of more than five

consecutive days in some instances, while shackled and wearing a diaper. These techniques failed to produce any intelligence.

The government issued a press release about Rahim, allegedly detailing his enemy activity, but it appears to be about another person entirely. This account, which Warner views as an example of the government's general confusion, describes a low-level Al Qaeda operative, not, as was alleged about Rahim, a close associate of Osama bin Laden with "ties to Al Qaeda...throughout the Middle East". A subsequent government report, filed in federal court in response to Warner's habeas corpus petition seeking Rahim's release, portrays him as a member of bin Laden's inner circle, information based mostly on the word of two fellow Gitmo prisoners, and an informant who may have been subjected to torture.

Warner says that there is no indication that Rahim was an associate of bin Laden's. Rahim *did* fight in Afghanistan, notes his brother, Basit, who I interview via Skype from his home in London, but it was during the war against the Soviets. Indeed, he and Warner note, Rahim worked for a time with the CIA. "The irony is, the ISI [Pakistani intelligence] picked him up, and the first thing he said was he wanted to talk with the CIA," says Warner. "He trusted them because he'd worked with them, and he thought they'd help him."

Whatever may be true about Rahim, Warner says, the government has told him that he will never be charged, or tried. Nor, Warner says, will he likely get a PRB, as no high-value prisoner as yet has been given that option. Warner hopes to convince the government the only thing "high value" about Rahim is that he bore witness to his own torture. In the meantime, Rahim writes Warner brief, often one-paragraph notes, some of which resemble haiku, on topics ranging from LeBron James to Donald Trump to Caitlyn Jenner (who he suggested use spray tan on her legs). In one note from 2013, he said he reads ROLLING STONE. Not long ago, he sent Warner a brief letter, quoting Camus: "The only way to deal with an unfree world is to become so absolutely free that your very existence becomes an act of rebellion." He then wrote, "I AM HERE."

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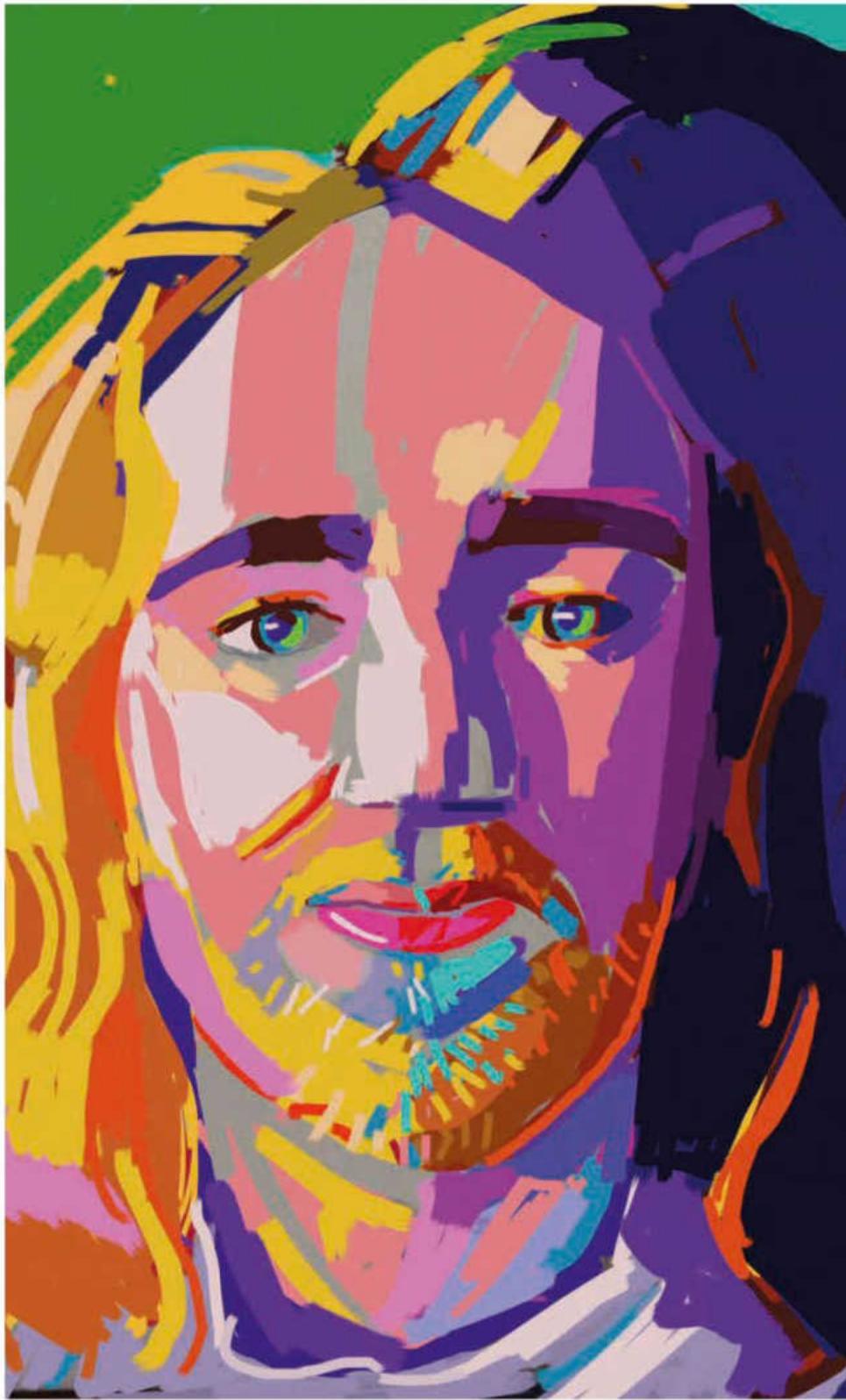
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## Matt Corby's Search For His Sound

After several false starts, indie journeyman finally delivers a debut LP – with mixed results



### Matt Corby

Telluric Universal



BY GARETH HIPWELL

Nine years and five EPs after he was conspicuously wrong-footed by his 2007 *Australian Idol* experience, Matt Corby continues to confound: routinely selling-out shows and running tracks up the Hottest 100 flagpole (including ARIA-winners “Resolution” and the galling “Brother”) without ever offering a clear statement of what it is he’s actually about.

Abandoning the kitschy Nick Drake idolatry of 2009’s *Song For . . .* EP and the triumphal folk-pop of *Transition to Colour* (2010), Corby showed he was capable of producing interesting work with roots-soul outing *Into the Flame* (2011), the frenzied climax of the *Resolution* EP’s “Evangelist” (2013), and the baroque “What the Devil Has Made” (2014). None of which amounts to anything like bedrock creative consistency.

As Corby tells it, his first tilt at an LP was shelved at the 22-

demo stage by "mutual consent" with the label, prompting him to disappear into the Tweed hinterland to teach himself "everything: keys, drums, bass, guitar, flute" before cutting early demos with producer-of-note Mocky (Feist) in Paris.

*Telluric*, then, is a fraught exercise in self-realisation, over which the threat that Corby's ambitions might be cruelled by his own rootlessness looms large. Surprisingly, it's a cohesive effort – eventual producer Dann Hume (Alpine) steering Corby toward a consistent tonal palette and reining in the vocal excesses that the singer's gravity-defying range might otherwise suggest.

Opener "Belly Side Up" is chic enough, with its spacey keys, gauzy vocal lines, and jazz-lite percussion, but smacks of loungier entries from the likes of Sneaker Pimps or Zero 7. To retool style is to learn as much as it is to create, and making an album with instruments he's only recently mastered means Corby falls just short of true re-

**'Telluric'** is the work of an artist still in the process of staking out his style.

invention. Recycling inevitably follows, and Corby doesn't reach back far enough for inspiration to grasp the kind of nostalgia he needs to carry it all off.

The funk-inflected soul bounce of "Knife Edge", though – with its expansive vocal part, natty drums, and richly-textured guitar tones – comes closer to wedging the timeless and the timely, and Corby can't be accused of recycling when it comes to lead single "Monday" – which, tellingly, is all but a capella.

It's not until the midway point that Corby really hits his stride. Adorned with organ and flute, second single "Sooth Lady Wine" is exactly the kind of haute Sixties futurist style-piece *Telluric* needs, while Corby locks into a genuinely seductive groove with "We Could Be Friends".

While *Telluric* is the work of an artist still in the process of staking out his style, it's Corby's surest step yet toward that goal.

**KEY TRACKS:** "Knife Edge", "Monday", "Sooth Lady Wine"



## The Ghosts of Brit-Rock Past

Sydney band's debut delivers well-crafted, catchy tunes with attitude

**DMA's** *Hills End* I Oh You/Mushroom ★★★½



Around early 2014, when Australia was nodding off under a glut of nu-soul and electronica, Sydney label I Oh You discovered DMA's, three mates demo-ing bolshy Nineties-inspired tunes in their Newtown flat, unconcerned even with playing live.

Perhaps the imprint saw a parallel between Violent Soho, their once-unfashionable grunge success story, and this act's earnest interest in jangly singalongs, tracksuit tops, and shit hats: DMA's have no fucks to give. *Hills End*, the trio's much-anticipated debut crammed with the ghosts of Brit-rock past, is an enjoyably unapologetic argument.

Centrepiece single "Delete", already an international concern and, reprised here with a string section, remains a snowballing, Oasis-tinged ballad, frontman Tommy O'Dell's vague, vowel-bending pub poetry affecting enough. "Lay Down" and "Too Soon" again suggest the Gallagher brothers but in leering rock mode, while "In the Moment" and "Straight Dimensions" evoke the chiming, hook-drenched pop nailed by the La's and James. It's not all UK-laced: the cleverly arranged "Melbourne" and "Step Up the Morphine" are deceptively timeless; "Blown Away" swirls out like a Flaming Lips space gem.

*Hills End* was largely self-recorded by the band but with outside help, including bigshot mixer Mark "Spike" Stent (Coldplay, Muse). Yes, classic references abound, but it's also the sound of a young band confident of being considered among their peers. It isn't rocket science, but sometimes heart's enough.

MARCUS TEAGUE



**Poliça**

*United Crushers*  
Pod/Inertia ★★½

Serious synth-rock band struggle to move beyond mood

Poliça have an unconventional line-up, consisting of vocalist Channy Leaneagh, drummers Drew Christopherson and Ben Ivascu, and bassist Chris Beirden. But their music is part-made and produced by Ryan Olsen, who doesn't appear live or in photos. Olsen's influence is profound – *United Crushers* is the group writing and recording together for the first time, but their noir-ish synth rock remains more cloistered creation than band. Part of that is Olsen's relentless love of digital squelches and kooky effects, but Leaneagh's is a detached presence too. "Top Coat" has a great dour trip-hop crunch, but for all its atmosphere, *United Crushers* never feels all that real.

M.T.



**Primal Scream**

*Chaosmosis* Warner  
★★★½

The wily Scots keep dancing and trancing

They always did the unexpected from record to record – shambling indie to acid house to Southern rock to Krautrock. Album number 11 finds them both regressing and relaxing. "Trippin' On Your Love" sounds like an out-take from 1991's *Screamadelica*, from Bobby Gillespie's opening exhortations to "Come on! Everybody now! Go! Get ready!" to the House piano, trippy back-beat and the three sisters from Haim wailing in harmony. A clutch of songs echo mid-period New Order, when they became a sleek dance-pop outfit, especially "Where the Light Gets In", with Sky Ferreira on vocals. Lyrically, Gillespie is on a nouveau-hippie trip, with talk of arms raised to the sun and hearts like open books.

B.D.

# Iggy's Stone Age Assault

Last Stooge standing gets able support from QOTSA dudes

**Iggy Pop** *Post Pop Depression*  
Caroline ★★★½



Meet the new gang. They're not quite as basic black as the Ramones-chic cover shot might suggest. In his first non-Stooges rock record since 2003, Iggy Pop's straight-shooting lyrics make their bed in the rather more rich and undulating musical terrain of producer Josh Homme.

From the echoing garage rock fanfare of "Break Into Your Heart", it's clear who's calling the shots. Pop's wildly oscillating baritone is a declaration of intent backed up by that most persuasive of credentials: survival.

The band – add Homme's QOTSA comrade Dean Fertita and Arctic Monkeys drummer Matt Helders – limber up on "Gardenia": a sinewy, rumbling rocker about a girl with "an hourglass ass". It's the single, but possibly the most disposable track. Go figure.

A rock god's yearning for "American Valhalla" can't help but resonate more profoundly, just as "German Days" obviously summons the weight

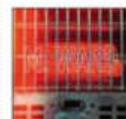


of the artist's glory days circa *Lust For Life* and *The Idiot*.

The first half of "Sunday" might almost have hailed from those legendary sessions, until a rather gratuitous coda lays on the baroque orchestration and waltzing angels.

Hey, whatever. Homme's fuzz-fisted aesthetic and the maestro's unflinching will to document his truth reach a mutual zenith in the unhinged diatribe of "Paraguay". "I just thought well fuck it man, I'm gonna pack my soul and scram," the godfather croons. Good thing we got this out of him first.

MICHAEL DWYER



**M. Ward**

*More Rain* Bella Union/Mushroom  
★★★½

Folk-pop lifer shifts the furniture around his well-worn universe

After seven solo records, stints in She & Him, Monsters Of Folk, and production services to the likes of Mavis Staples and Jenny Lewis, M. Ward defines the chameleonic everyman. This grab-bag of talents suits his unplaceable folk-pop perfectly. The question is: where to next? Initially conceived as a "DIY doo-wop" album, *More Rain* instead retains Ward's stylistic fingerprints – the foggy, acoustic guitar; his husky voice doused in echo; the freefall through knockabout pop ("I'm Going Higher"), chugging rockers ("Time Won't Wait Up") and heavy-lidded folk ("Slow Driving Man"). There's never a sense of who Ward actually is, just wonder at the world spun by this elusive magician.

M.T.



**Elliphant**  
*Living Life Golden*  
TEN/Kemosabe/Sony ★★★½  
Swedish songstress delivers promising international debut

Since befriending producers Jungle at a party in Paris a few years ago, Ellinor Olovsdotter aka singer-songwriter-rapper Elliphant has collaborated with the likes of David Guetta, Diplo and Skrillex, laying her abrasive, culturally contentious style of singjaying over some undeniable moombahton beats. Her label head Dr. Luke contributes to production on this broader-ranging international debut; the bangers are balanced out with emotive Scandi-pop (the Joel Little-produced "One More" featuring MO; "Where is Home", featuring Twin Shadow and a huge guitar chorus). Cheesy play for radio airplay "Love Me Long" is the only glaring misstep – Elliphant's just not cut out for convention.

ANNABEL ROSS



**Damien Jurado**  
*Visions of Us on the Land*  
Secretly Canadian/Inertia ★★★½  
Enduring singer-storyteller continues to innovate

The final part of a trilogy recorded with producer Richard Swift (the Shins), and Jurado's 12th studio album, *Visions of Us on the Land* is a rich and compelling journey. From 2012's *Maraqopa* and 2014's *Brothers and Sisters of the Eternal Son*, the trilogy follows an imagined protagonist on a series of chance meetings in fictional locales. The bare-bones indie-folk of Jurado's early career is now combined with a wild and loose Americana; AM radio classics ("A.M. A.M.") sit alongside eerie psych-sounds reminiscent of Sixties spaghetti western soundtracks ("TAQOMA", "Lon Bella") and percussive retro-lounge ("QACHINA"). Diverse, accomplished and adventurous, *Visions*... charms.

MEL LAKE



**Grant-Lee Phillips**  
*The Narrows* Yeproc  
★★★  
Home and history shift under U.S. troubadour's moccasins

Maybe it's craft and maybe it's some kinda spooky race memory, but the slow-rolling wagon train under a big prairie sky has been Grant-Lee Phillips' default musical panorama since the first Grant Lee Buffalo album of 1993. Allusions to his new home in "Tennessee Rain" and his native American ancestry in "Moccasin Creek" and "Cry Cry" ensure a strong sense of place both real and imagined, with a cold backhander for his forsaken Los Angeles in "San Andreas Fault". With smears of ghostly steel and the hollow plunk of mandolin over familiar acoustic crunch, Phillips' new Nashville trio plays to the distinctive thread of wistfulness in a voice that just won't age.

MICHAEL DWYER



**Nada Surf**  
*You Know Who You Are*  
Stop Start ★★★  
More uplifting melancholy from jangly indie rock stalwarts

These New Yorkers looked destined for novelty status after their 1996 hit "Popular", but they've carved out a fine career, peaking with 2002's *Let Go* and 2008's *Lucky*. Album no. 8 is full of their trademarks – the ringing of jangly guitars underpinned by a sinewy rhythm section and topped with Matthew Caws' keening vocals. If anything, a few too many of these new songs are echoes of past triumphs and the arrangements become a little predictable. Caws maintains a boy-ish curiosity even in middle age, whether he's reliving infatuation ("Rushing") or encouraging someone to get off the couch ("Out Of the Dark"). Still, when they finally rock out on the title track, it comes as a relief from all that reflection.

B.D.

**Koi Child***Koi Child*

Pilerats/Warner Music ★★★½

**WA septet deliver hybrid of soul, jazz and hip-hop on lively debut**

A love child produced after two bands (Child's Play and Kashikoi) jammed onstage in 2014 and decided they wanted to continue, Fremantle seven-piece Koi Child keep things playful and loose on a debut LP that ably channels the Nineties neo-soul of the Roots and their Soulquarian collective. Vocalist Shannon "Cruz" Patterson isn't the most commanding presence as an MC and the lyrics are largely stoned non-sequiturs, but his liquid flow complements the agile playing and laidback vibe perfectly. Given a warm analogue glow from producer/mixer Kevin Parker (Tame Impala), *Koi Child* is an inviting first step that begs to be heard live in the smallest, smokiest club possible.

JAMES JENNINGS

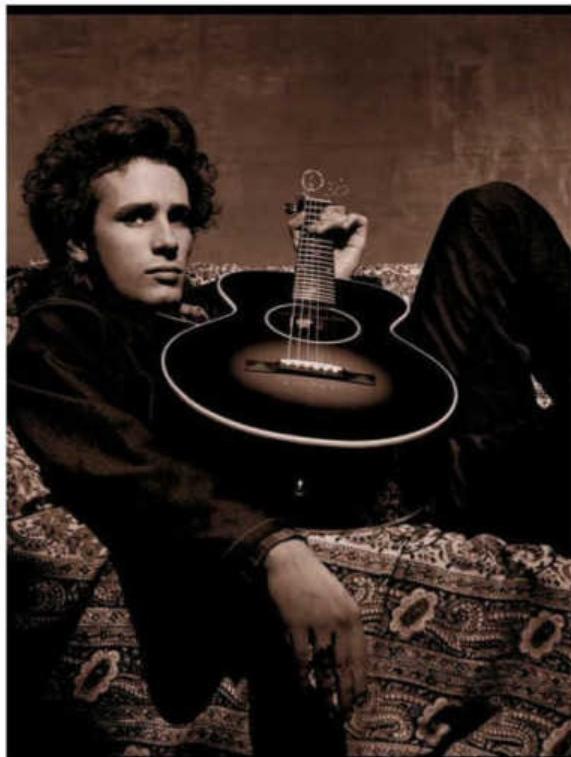
**The Cat Empire***Rising With the Sun*

Two Shoes ★★★★

**Melbourne sextet return to form, throw another global fiesta**

Compared with the relatively more pop-of-no-nation sounds of *Steal the Light* (2013) and *Cinema* (2010), the Cat Empire's sixth studio outing is a markedly intercontinental affair. While the synth-stacked "Wolves" reprises the electronic bent exhibited on *Steal*, it's a tune underwritten by bright, punchy brass and carnivale percussion, while "Bulls" sounds like a roving Mardi Gras street party with its reggae bounce and soaring horns. "Blasting Away" is a Latin dance anthem, "Midnight" takes us to the streets of Kingston, while "Bataclan" is a defiant response to recent Parisian horrors. Add to that the cool jazz notes of "Daggers Drawn" and it's an ebullient celebration sans frontiers.

GARETH HIPWELL



# Raiding the Buckley Vaults

**More covers, no surprises from unearthed collection of demos**

**Jeff Buckley** *You and I*

Sony ★★★



Great song, "Grace". But you knew that. You'd own nine versions if you'd bought every official release in the prolonged grieving of its author. Whether you need a tenth, frankly, says more about your obsession than Jeff Buckley's tragically terminated talent.

It's a good one, for the record: a twangin' and wailin' solo studio take that highlights the alluring strangeness of its construction and the rawness of his passion. "Dream of You And I", the other original here, isn't so much a song as a monologue. Not to be confused with "You & I" on *Sketches For My Sweetheart the Drunk*, it's Buckley's rambling recount of a surreal dream over a few strummed changes. Which leaves eight cover versions to bulk up this latest fossick through the Sony Columbia archives, of which his two muted Smiths selections – "The Boy With the Thorn In His Side" and especially "I Know It's Over" – are the closest thing to revelation.

**KEY TRACK:**

"Don't Let the Sun Catch You Cryin'"

He's done Dylan better than this lamentably melismatic version of "Just Like A Woman" and Zeppelin better, too, than this slightly shrill take on "Night Flight", though his choices from Bukka White, tin pan alley and Sly Stone continue to flesh out a picture of what made this remarkable artist tick.

In the absence of meaningful music per se, maybe that's enough to vouch safe the legend.

MICHAEL DWYER

**Mangelwurzel**

Gary Independent

★★★½

**Jaala's other band thrives on itchy unpredictability**

Last year, Mangelwurzel front-woman Cosima Jaala released her acclaimed first solo album. But that shouldn't overshadow this jigsaw ensemble, who defy easy categorisation with their genre-scrambled sound. Jaala's vocals range from rapping and screaming to pop sweetness and indie rock weirdness, while the horn section swings from Dixieland to ska to mariachi. This thinly-recorded, reverberated debut doesn't capture the sheer wildness and colour saturation of the Melbourne band's killer live show, but it does transmit their herky-jerky cool. Whatever her outlet, Jaala oozes quirky charisma, dropping sardonic one-liners like "I guess you're not dumb enough to be my guy".

DOUG WALLEN

**Tonight Alive***Limitless* Sony

★★

**Sydney quintet set their sights on the big time**

No longer content to hang with the pop-punk pack, Tonight Alive's third album jettisons the "punk" part of their sound. Polished to the point of sparkling, *Limitless* is a play for the mainstream, heavy on emotional, string-laden ballads ("Oxygen", "The Greatest") and emotive, synth-infused Top 40 rock ("How Does It Feel?", "To Be Free"). There's no faulting the songwriting – "Drive" is as good a pop song as you'll hear – and Jenna McDougall's lyrical emphasis on self empowerment is admirable and heartfelt. But as a whole, *Limitless* feels overworked and over-calculated. Bands have every right to evolve and dream big, but in doing so Tonight Alive have completely dulled their edges.

ROD YATES

# Brit-Hop Star Waxes Poetic

## The Bricks That Built The Houses

Kate Tempest

Bloomsbury

★★★★★



Those aware of Kate Tempest will be alive to her piquant insight into the ordinary desperation of Brits through verse and delivery, in particular her epic poem *Brand New Ancients*. Thus her debut novel is a feast of metaphors, funny and fulfilling, shifting speeds and points of view, describing one of her love triangle as "A knife amongst all the flesh. The kind of woman that starts chaos in strangers all day."

The book heaves with this kind of magic as Becky (dancer, masseuse, bi) meets Harry (female, high end drug dealer, gay) and Pete (Harry's brother, thoughtful loser, straight), entering a relationship with the latter. Parents, friends and contacts all get detailed backstories as Tempest 'builds the houses' that line the streets of her London in flux. Citing William Blake and James Joyce as inspirations, her narrative engine owes



more to Irvine Welsh or Bret Easton Ellis; the drug nonchalance and subsequent deal rip-off may have its roots in reality, but it possesses a regularity that could have used a little oomph. Instead her interest is in the synapse-sized internal narrative, the crash-bang-wallop of love and lust and shame.

With a similar sense of selection, her female characters are beautifully realised, tough while the men are dolts or capricious meatheads. Ultimately, Tempest earns her moniker in the internal maelstrom, alloying blistering observation to fizzy lyric while making the heart and loins glow. It's not perfect, but a perfect beginning.

DANIEL MURPHY



**Jack Garratt**

*Phase* Universal

★★½

British newcomer drifts by on debut record

This is not the first musical incarnation of Jack Garratt. Previous to his current turn of hushed electro pop he recorded an entire album of acoustic blues while signed to a small indie label; he scrapped it, declaring it to be 'not him', and promptly disappeared for a time before re-emerging as the act we hear on *Phase*. He's moved about as far away from acoustic blues as one could get, positioning himself in the centre of the zeitgeist: soulful, synth leaning indie pop underscored by skittish beats and capped by his gentle falsetto. Lead singles "Breathe Life" and "Weathered" are strong, propelled by colossal, grippy hooks – but for the most part, *Phase* drifts by.

JULES LEFEVRE



**Urthboy**

*The Past Beats Inside Me Like A Second Heartbeat*

Elefant Traks ★★★★

**Tim Levinson's heartfelt fifth full-length**

With each successive release Urthboy has built upon his reputation as a fluent and gifted storyteller. *The Past Beats Inside Me . . .*, his fifth full-length, cements a place among the greats, overlaying histories personal and public until the lines are blurred, pivoting mid-record on the brilliant, throbbing "Rubble of the Past". Remembrance and family are everywhere, a picture of romantic abandon painted on "Rushing Through Me", closely followed by slouching menace on "Wolves At Bay". It might shift speeds a little too quickly here and there, but a shining thread of warmth and open-heartedness runs throughout, and in the end the outcome matches the ambition.

D.F.



**Mothers**

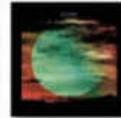
*When You Walk a Long Distance You Are Tired*

Wichita/Liberation ★★★★

**Brilliant indie pop debut from Athens, Georgia, knockabouts**

Mothers centre around the affecting, lilting voice and probing, challenging, lyrical songcraft of Kristine Leschper, and the quartet have utilised those aspects to their full effect. Everything here is walking a tightrope of heart-rending emotion and almost-flippant irreverence, all set to intricate and shambolically precise guitar pop. Across the choppy, noisy backroom pop of "Lockjaw" or the sparse but affecting "Nesting Behavior", Leschper is asking difficult questions, offering up difficult revelations. On highlight "It Hurts Until It Doesn't" Leschper goes deep on her own ego, muttering: "I don't like myself when I'm awake." It's powerful, poignant, and near perfect.

JAYMZ CLEMENTS



**LNZNDRF**

*LNZNDRF 4AD/Remote Control*

★★★★

**Another year, another the National side-project**

LNZNDRF initialises the surnames of the National's rhythm section Scott and Bryan Devendorf, and collaborator Ben Lanz (Beirut). The LP comprises eight heavily condensed live jams, casting the band as likable pretenders to the New Wave throne. While chief vocalist Lanz could pass at times for a drowsier Ian Curtis ("Beneath the Black Sea"), Bryan's familiarly National-esque percussion work (see the ack-ack snare of opener "Future You") can't help but preempt a cathartic Matt Berninger vocal refrain. But there's catharsis here, too: in several rewarding climaxes built on swelling rhythmic crosscurrents, space-rock guitar colours, and moody synth patches à la Primitive Calculators ("Stars and Time").

G.H.



**Simple Plan**

*Taking One For the Team*

Warner

★★½

**French-Canadian quintet stick to their pop-punk guns**

Five years on from 2011's *Get Your Heart On!*, Simple Plan have dusted off their signature punk-pop for their fifth album. Those after something groundbreaking will need to look elsewhere though, with "Opinion Overload", "Everything Sucks" and "I Don't Wanna Be Sad" bursting with the usual cheesy, angst-ridden lyrics and catchy pop hooks. There are hints of experimentation in the reggae rhythms of "Singing In the Rain" and a rap cameo courtesy of Nelly in "I Don't Wanna Go To Bed", but such attempts to branch out don't quite reach far enough. Energetic, fun and easy to swallow, *Taking One For the Team* is exactly what you'd expect, for better or for worse.

SALLY McMULLEN

**Robert Pollard***Of Course You Are* Fire ★★½**Prolific Guided By Voices**  
frontman lets quality control slip

There are prolific songwriters... and then there's Robert Pollard. His 24th solo album – he also released 22 with Guided By Voices – was recorded with just one musician, multi-instrumentalist Nick Mitchell. As a result there's a slight disconnect and lack of spark because of all the inevitable layering that had to take place. Pollard is at his best when he combines '60s classic rock, '70s power pop and '90s lo-fi on the curly tunes and sharp riffs of "I Can Illustrate" and "The Hand That Holds You", but a band might have kicked these songs a notch or three higher. The more baroque moments, such as the cello-driven "Come and Listen", and the synthesized horns on "Little Pigs" stall proceedings, not aided by Pollard's uncertain delivery. **BARRY DIVOLA**

**Ben Abraham***Sirens* Secretly Canadian/Inertia

★★½

**Mournful romance from emerging Aussie**

This debut from Melbourne-based Abraham is nothing if not sincere. However syrupy this collection of emotive ballads becomes, his breathy delivery retains an air of authenticity, albeit amid largely derivative lyrics addressing love and loss. His polished sound is probably generic enough to attract a large audience – "I Belong To You" sits somewhere between David Gray and Sting, and is as smoothly produced as that suggests. One wonders whether rougher arrangements of highlights such as "This Is On Me" and "Somebody's Mother" would allow them added zest. As it is, *Sirens* lacks urgency and grit, though it does offer a certain warmth and intimacy that some will find moving. **BARNABY SMITH**



# The Price Is Right

Restless renegade has fun but fails to break new ground on long-awaited third effort

**Santigold** *99 Cents* Atlantic/Warner ★★½

The artist born Santi White and formerly known as Santigold is having a not-so-sly poke at consumer culture in *99 Cents* (the cover of which depicts White wrapped in plastic alongside a bunch of other material objects from keyboards to plastic ponies). As on her last two records, she draws upon a mishmash of genres to voice her concerns. Lead single "Can't Get Enough of Myself", featuring B.C., skewers our selfie-centric culture through her characteristic sing-songy verse and upbeat brass arrangements, and "Big Boss Big Time Business" and "Banshee" blend new-school dancehall with the kind of bratty punk favoured on Charli XCX's *Sucker* (it's not surprising to learn that four of *Sucker*'s producers – longtime White collaborator John Hill, Rostam Batmanglij, Patrik Berger and Justin Raisen – had a hand in *99 Cents*).

The problem with having such a flighty relationship with genre is that we've heard White dip into most of these sounds – including the Eighties new-wave stylings that dominate the back end – before. There are exceptions: "Walking in a Circle", all vocoder doom and *Twilight Zone* synths, is eerie new turf, and "Who Be Lovin Me", featuring ILOVEMAKONNEN, is similarly appealing for its curiously melancholic brand of braggadocio. Still, there's nothing here that's half as hooky as previous album standouts "L.E.S. Artistes" and "Disparate Youth".

**KEY TRACKS:**  
"Walking in a Circle", "Before the Fire"

**ANNABEL ROSS****Elizabeth Rose***Intra Inertia* ★★½**Producer-songwriter wears her influences on her sleeves**

Best known as the girl who sung (very nicely) on the Flight Facilities track "I Didn't Believe", Rose is a talented producer in her own right, demonstrated on this debut LP of slinky, RnB-influenced electronic grooves. Owing more to the likes of Ciara and Nineties girl groups like Girlfriend than her previous club-oriented collaborators, Rose apes Janet Jackson's breathy vocals on "In 3's" and borrows from Britney on "Playing With Fire". It's all slick and tasteful but rather homogenous bar the pretty, balladic closer "Steal Hearts", emphasising the missed opportunity to diversify. Rose has made her RnB/pop ambitions clear, but *Intra* says more about who she listens to than who she is and why we should care.

**A.R.****Big White***Teenage Dreams* Caroline

★★★

**Beguiling debut from Sydney rockers**

You can instantly hear the big-ticket influences within *Teenage Dreams*: Robert Smith's propulsive vocal; Johnny Marr's jangling and intermingling guitars; the looseness of Dick Diver. The impressive ability of Big White is that, despite being undeniably derivative, they still manage to sound refreshing. It's one lax, relentlessly sunny, guitar driven track after another, while Nick Griffith waxes lyrical about Instagram and heroin and warm days on the beach and late nights in the city and, of course, teenage dreams. At their worst, they really phone it in on the murky "American Twins", but at their best they weave in delicate pop melodies and embrace the sun: "You Know I Love You", "Tuesday".

**JULES LEFEVRE**

# The Drones' Reality Check

Human history is one scary movie in these slashers' hands

## The Drones

*Feein Kinda Free* Tropical Fuckstorm ★★★★

 The Horror! The Horror! Even the guitars sound tortured in the psychic prison of "Private Execution", an Indonesian nightmare with a squalling slasher movie soundtrack. "Let's change the topic before I get misanthropic," Gareth Liddiard sneers in the bilious denunciation of a "fixed civilisation".

But it's too late to play nice. "Taman Shud" is the sickening sound of a moral compass shattering under jackboots and Blundstones. "You came here in a boat you fucking cunt" is the insult that damns us all.

So goes the poisonous pitch of the Drones' seventh album, a stream of invective for centuries of violence, idiocy and possibly an ex-girlfriend or two: "To Think That I Once Loved You" employs the kind of lovely madrigal chorus one might commission for a stoning.

### KEY TRACKS:

"Private Execution", "Taman Shud"



The nagging suggestion that we've forgotten a little too much history is a constant anxiety as Liddiard's literate allusions leap from Levantine Sea to PNG; a coiled snarl of reproach from the creeping terror of "Then They Came For Me" to the suburban graffiti of "Boredom".

The slightly tweaked line-up has concocted a sound like pestilence itself: an electronic mutation of amplified strings, synths and brittle drums with solos escaping like experiments from some black ops labs.

Misanthropic? "Shutdown SETI" declares us unworthy as a species, on an intergalactic level. Harsh. But the evidence, in these hands, is awfully persuasive.

MICHAEL DWYER



## Steve Mason

*Meet the Humans* Double Six

★★½

Former Beta Band frontman sticks to the middle of the road

Steve Mason's fragile voice was the perfect foil for the ragged, wantonly experimental music of his former group the Beta Band; the calm in a usually calamitous sonic storm. On the third LP released under his own name, Mason's low-key demeanour is matched with equally low-key, unfussy and deflatingly middle-of-the-road folk-rock songs that are drained of any character thanks to a glossy sheen from producer (and Elbow keyboardist) Craig Potter. "Hardly Go Through" has a decent stab at re-capturing the mantra-anthem catchiness of Beta Band classic "Dry the Rain", but for the most part it's all a bit ho-hum, right down to the discouraging final lyrics: "Please don't ever listen to the words that I said".



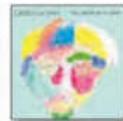
## Miike Snow

*iii* Warner

★★★½

Producers Bloodshy & Avant reunite with Andrew Wyatt

Between the production jobs for Mick Ronson and Bruno Mars, chart-topping EDM project Galantis and a collaboration with Flume, it's a small miracle Miike Snow's three very busy members were able to make this album at all. But over a few days in an L.A. studio, the supergroup put together half of *iii*, a feel-good affair full of chest-beating love songs and jealous dude anthems like "Genghis Khan" (don't "get it on with nobody else but me", songwriter Andrew Wyatt begs in a chorus that should be cringier than it is). Soul, big band and even hip-hop influences work their way in – that's Run the Jewels on "Heart Is Full" – but at their core, these are slick and addictive pop songs. KATIE CUNNINGHAM



## Gabriella Cohen

*Full Closure and No Details*

Independent ★★★★

Nonchalant Queenslander's solo debut is garage-pop bliss

"This could be love/this could be not," sings Gabriella Cohen ("This Could Be Love"). If Cohen has a point to make with *Full Closure*, it's that she can't be fucked deciding either way. Featuring input from a host of Brisbane indie peers, *Full Closure* is a kaleidoscopic fuzz-pop statement to rival Cohen's best work with the Furs. It's an LP stacked with hazy girl-group melodies ("Sever the Walls") and kitsch-pop BVs, blanketed by slacker guitar tones like that weird greasy slick that surfaces from every pore when it's properly humid ("Dream Song"). Cohen nails disaffected twenty-something insouciance at every turn – see her spacey Kate Bush turn on "Yesterday", and laid-back garage soul posturing on "Downtown".

GARETH HIPWELL



## Thao & the Get Down Stay Down

*A Man Alive* Domino ★★★½

Shape-shifting singer expands horizons to dazzling effect

Thao Nguyen's previous records sometimes seemed awkwardly torn between her penchant for country and blues on one hand, and a fascination with hip-hop and electronica on the other. *A Man Alive* is a firm step towards the latter, on the back of hugely inventive production from Merrill Garbus of tUnE-yArDs. The resultant sound is redolent of both Beck and Bat For Lashes, with heavy, Funkadelic-esque bass rhythms driving standouts "Slash Burn" and "Departure". Her voice, too, seems more relaxed and restrained – even on the captivating "Fool Forever" and "Meticulous Bird", which are basically rapped. Melodic yet sufficiently weird, this is certainly Thao's best yet. B.S.



## Hælos

*Full Circle*

Matador/Remote Control ★★★

London trio's partially successful trip-hop revival debut

Some bands arrive fully-formed; some are an amalgamation of influences in search of their own identity. HÆLOS are the latter, sounding very much like the xx would if they relied too heavily on dated Nineties trip-hop beats. "Pray" sets a dubious tone by coming off like the xx aping Play-era Moby; "Earth Not Above" shoots for Massive Attack circa '91 but fails to make the same impact. The album begins to come into its own, though, during the more euphoric second half (see rave workout "Oracle" and the gospel-influenced "Separate Lives"). By being less xx and more themselves next go around, HÆLOS may have a shot at transcending their influences for something greater.

JAMES JENNINGS

**Cub Sport***This Is Our Vice*

Nash Icon ★★

Loads of synths and heartbreak  
on Brisbane outfit's debut

Cub Sport's heart is in the right place, and their work on 2013's *Told You So* was a Beatles-y kaleidoscope of weird indie pop: here though, they fail to fire. It's fine for *This Is Our Vice* to slew more towards self-reflective, downer territory, but that it relies so heavily on well-tread synth-pop is where it lets itself down. There's value in the heart-worn sentiments of "I Can't Save You" and "I Feel Bad Now", and evocative, introspective moments such as the icy hot "Only Friend" and "Mess Me Up" offer redemption. The problem lies in the tepid indie-electro that, while perfectly pleasant, means the heart-worn sentiments don't land the punch they ought to, and equals a missed opportunity. J.C.

**Black Peaches***Get Down You Dirty Rascals*  
1965 Records ★★★★

Worldly wig-outs from Hot Chip side project

Following on from fine recent records from Alexis Taylor and the 2 Bears, here's another fascinating side project from a member of Hot Chip. Rob Smoughton's Black Peaches have produced a dizzyingly colourful debut that swings confidently – chiefly led by an emphasis on rhythm and groove – between the jazz-inflected jams of Traffic, the Latin-influenced folk-rock of Stephen Stills' Manassas, the country-psych of Beachwood Sparks, and even prog. The simple funkiness of these sprawling tracks, particularly "Suivez Moi", ensures there is clarity amid the cauldron of ingredients. Melody is not neglected either – see "Double Top" – on an irresistibly expansive triumph. BARNABY SMITH



# The Return of the Riff

Brisbane quartet continue to mine a rich vein of form on fourth full-length

**Violent Soho** WACO

I Oh You ★★★★



With 2013's *Hungry Ghost*, Violent Soho proved Australia's appetite for rock & roll – even when as heavily soaked in bong smoke as a Geelong teenager's bungalow couch – was in need of sating like the harshest case of dry-mouth. *WACO* finds the foursome again sparking up the big guitars with relish, though this time it's more nimble and nuanced, adding a deft melodic lightness to Violent Soho's signature slate of bruising longhair riffs.

Rerunning elements of *Hungry Ghost* – producer Bryce Moorhead and Brisbane's The Shed studios – may have resulted in stagnation, but that hasn't eventuated: witness the textural, light touch of "So Sentimental" and the loping sunshine-bass-riff intro and tight Weezer-lite melody of second single "Viceroy". Their knack for statement-of-intent opening salvos, meanwhile, remains undiminished with "How To Taste".

Boerdam's lyrics deliver big ideas wrapped in small moments, with plenty of choruses built to be shouted along with (even veering into half-remembered Blink-182, Pixies and – gulp – Sugar Ray motifs), but the riffs reign supreme. Lead single "Like Soda" is a fist-pumping proto-punk singalong slugger of the highest order, while the thrill of "Evergreen" – which careens to its chorus like a flailing body flung off the top of a speaker stack – and the heavy-lidded churn-cum-thundering-burn of closer "Low" make it clear that *Hungry Ghost* was no fluke. It may have taken a decade for Violent Soho to break through, but if *WACO* is any indication, their climb isn't anywhere near over. JAYMZ CLEMENTS

**Underworld***Barbara, Barbara, we face a shining future* Caroline

★★★★

British veterans still going strong three decades in

It's been a while since "Born Slippery", the song that soundtracked Ewan McGregor's decision to choose life in the final scene of *Trainspotting*, but Karl Hyde and Rick Smith haven't lost their touch for wide-eyed dance music. *Barbara, Barbara, we face a shining future* is classic Underworld, full of hazy drums and Hyde's spoken-word vocals, which are as esoteric here as they ever were. Track lengths sprawl over seven or eight minutes, even dabbling in sitar on "Santiago Cuatro" and sometimes gearing up to a BPM designed for a packed and sweaty dancefloor. Seems middle age is no barrier to channelling top-notch Nineties rave vibes, then.

KATIE CUNNINGHAM

**Guerilla Toss***Eraser Stargazer* DFA

★★★½

DFA newbies hotwire a frantic, free-wheeling dance party

Serving up a frazzled cocktail of lo-fi psych and junkyard funk, New York ensemble Guerilla Toss extend DFA's dance-punk legacy while joining a longer line of oddball party-starters. Frontwoman Kassie Carlson's cartoonish mood swings recall Deerhoof and the B-52's alike, ricocheting off the music at every disjointed turn. All that chaos coalesces for some killer turns, like the six-minute adventure "Grass Shack", but other moments don't shine as brightly. One gets the sense that the live show is where to best experience Guerilla Toss, with the instruments juddering under Carlson's manic vocal runs. But *Eraser Stargazer* is still plenty exciting – like a paintball fight in a hall of mirrors. DOUG WALLEN

# Hoods Get Strung Out

Adelaide hip-hop trio reunite with symphony orchestra, add choir

## Hilltop Hoods

*Drinking From the Sun, Walking Under Stars Restrung* Golden Era ★★★★



Who would have thought, before their *Hard Road: Restrung* album nine years ago, that a Hilltop Hoods orchestral and choral remix album would be an anticipated event in the Australian hip-hop calendar? Clearly the Hoods did, and with the second release in their *Restrung* series they've managed to deliver a playful and experimental effort that is all the more impressive coming from veterans of the scene. This outing, a single record created from 2012's *Drinking from the Sun* and 2014's *Walking Under Stars*, re-imagines some of the songs on those two albums, adding a complexity and warmth that only a swag of live instruments and voices can bring. It also delivers two brand new tracks in "1955" and the killer "Higher", but

**KEY TRACKS:**  
"Cosby Sweater Restrung",  
"Higher"



it's the revised versions of familiar tunes that show how far their musical confidence has come.

"Cosby Sweater Restrung" comes fresh from a lounge music collision while "Shredding the Balloon Restrung" is a whole new experience when it's arranged with an angelic chorus line and muted trumpet that reframes the lyrical story of struggle. For Hoods fans, *Drinking From the Sun, Walking Under Stars Restrung* will add depth and drama to some well-known joints, but whether the source material is familiar or not the musicianship and experimentation on this record make it worthy of acclaim.

DANIEL FINDLAY



## Låpsley

*Long Way Home* XL Recordings

★★★

Steady and promising debut from London artist

London's Holly 'Låpsley' Fletcher feels and sounds a lot older than her 19 years. Her compositions are consistent and controlled, gently unravelling their pop melodies amid lilting electronic production. There's a youthful wisdom that hangs behind her lyrics – "tell me the truth, it'll hurt less I guess" ("Tell Me the Truth") – as if she can't ask for something without hiding behind a teenager's indifferent shrug. There are strong veins of Eighties dance ("Operator (He Doesn't Call Me)") and power pop ("Hurt Me"), as well as something thoroughly more modern with the deep house pulse of "Cliff". At times threatening to drift into the ether, Låpsley's dominating vocal never fails to bring it back to earth.

JULES LEFEVRE



## Paces

*Vacation* etcetc

★★★½

Club sounds shine on local's feel-good debut

Between the steel drums and samples of waves crashing onto the shore, the summer theme on *Vacation* isn't exactly subtle. Gold Coast dance act Paces has gone full tropical, enlisting collaborators from across the globe for Baile funk choruses sung entirely in Portuguese and steamy, dancefloor destined cuts like "Tell Me Now", a stand out track with Baltimore rapper/singer Rye Rye. Only when producer Mikey Perry veers a bit too much into sparkly, oversaturated synth territory on "Hard For Me" does he come off sounding dated, reproducing a sound others did better years earlier. Otherwise, this is a likable, admirably cohesive effort in a genre where albums often fail to go the distance.

KATIE CUNNINGHAM



## Rosie Lowe

*Control* Dew Process/Universal

★★★

London songwriter shines on debut album

Rosie Lowe is a multi-instrumentalist who grew up in Devon playing sax and singing jazz and discovered production software at uni. On *Control* her varied influences are threaded into one rich, sophisticated tapestry. Comparisons to Jessie Ware and Little Dragon are deserved; Lowe turns her cut-glass croon into an instrument working in tandem with the post-dubsteppy production, by turns densely layered and judiciously sparse, as in "Woman", a piano-led feminist ballad. "Nicole", a plea to a friend to leave a bad relationship, is similarly affecting, dotted with clicks, echoes, digitised harmonies and Lowe's innate understanding that just as important as what you say is how you say it.

ANNABEL ROSS



## So Pitted

*Neo Sub Pop/Inertia*

★★★

Sub Pop unearth another screaming Seattle trio

Between their hometown, record label and angst-ridden anthems, So Pitted invite Nirvana comparisons on this first LP. But that's just a starting point for the Seattle trio's overdriven noise-punk, laced darkly with goth, grunge and metal. It's grotty and snotty, gnarled and snarled, right from the feedback-seared opener "Cat Scratch". Frontman Nathan Rodriguez taps a volcanic rage to match the band's charred trashing, even if "Get Out of My Room" plays more like misanthropic comedy. The suffocating atmosphere rarely lets up, though "Pay Attention to Me" manages to make open space sound just as ominous. So Pitted bottle a roiling, fitful energy that makes you want to riot.

DOUG WALLEN



## Heron Oblivion

*Heron Oblivion* Sub Pop/Inertia

★★★

Brooding folk-rock from West Coast dream team

Few bands to emerge from the San Francisco psych scene are as impressively credentialed as this foursome, which features members of Howlin' Rain, Comets On Fire, Six Organs of Admittance, Sic Alps and others. Then there is Meg Baird on vocals and drums, whose lilting voice brings a sense of pastoral neo-folk to what is otherwise an album of electrified, moody, occasionally heavy, rock – imagine a more foreboding version of Trees. If Baird brings sensitivity, then guitarists Noel V. Harmonson and Charlie Saufley provide grunt and snarl – the most atmospheric jams being "Rama" and "Your Hollows". More experimental tracks, such as "Faro", evoke Deerhoof, adding another dimension to this debut.

B.S.

# A Coen Comedy Classic

# The Coen brothers take on Hollywood in a fizzy all-star farce anchored in – what else? – existential fear

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## Hail, Caesar!

*George Clooney, Josh Brolin, Scarlett Johansson, Tilda Swinton, Channing Tatum*

Directed by the Coen brothers

★★★★½

THE LAST THING A CRITIC expects at the start of a new year – the traditional burial ground for rotting digital corpses – is a major movie from major filmmakers. But that's what you get in *Hail, Caesar!*, a wild whoosh of Coen brothers wizardry that left me laughing helplessly and filled with spiritual dread. That's the Coens for you. Here, Ethan and Joel are messing with our heads more in the rat-a-tat style of *The Big Lebowski*, *Raising Arizona* and *Burn After Reading* than, say, *Fargo* or *Barton Fink*. But you'll still need to buckle up.

*Hail, Caesar!* is set in 1951 Hollywood, when studios turned out movies on an assembly line that sometimes, often accidentally, produced art. The irony is that making movies is often easier than keeping the talent in line. That task falls to Eddie Mannix (Josh Brolin), a studio fixer who can't let the gossips — the brilliant Tilda Swinton plays two of them — know which star is secretly cheating or pregnant or gay or crazy or a Commie bastard.

*Hail, Caesar!* is basically a day in the life of this studio cop, whose job is his religion. And Brolin, in a heart-and-soul performance, takes this crazy quilt of a movie about a man surrounded by nut jobs



Clooney as a movie star resting on his laurels

and plays it for real. He's just tremendous.

"Bless me, Father, for I have sinned" are the first words we hear from Mannix, a married Catholic who exasperates his priest in confession by asking



Johansson plays an aquatic screen sensation in a water ballet that can't hide her secrets.

forgiveness on an almost daily basis. On his own, Eddie is an insecure mess. Prowling the studio, he's a scary lion.

He has to be. Working for Capitol Pictures makes this ex-bouncer an executive baby-sitter. And what babies. Scarlett Johansson is a treat as the

studio's swim-star sweetheart (think Esther Williams) with a mouth like a gun moll. Channing Tatum is a knockout as a song-and-dance man (think Gene Kelly) with a political agenda. Tatum so nails his joyous tap routine with a chorus of sailors that you long to see a musical built around him.

And cheers to the terrific Alden Ehrenreich as the studio's cowboy star (think Roy Rogers), a drawling rube who is forced to star as an urban sophisticate, a role for which he is unforgettably unsuited. It's howlingly funny to watch a vexed Brit director (a priceless Ralph Fiennes) guide him through countless takes of the line "would that it 'twere so simple". The scene is one for the comedy time capsule.

You don't really notice a plot until the studio's star of stars, Baird Whitlock (George Clooney), gets kidnapped during production of a biblical epic called *Hail, Caesar!* Clooney has a blast adding Whitlock to the series of idiots he's played for the Coens (*O Brother, Where Art Thou?*, *Intolerable Cruelty*).

It's blasphemous fun watching him blow his lines in a cathartic scene with a crucified Christ.

Whitlock takes nothing seriously, not even being a hostage. That's why Mannix roughs him up hard. Trying to stay moral in this Hollywood Babylon, Mannix wrestles with a cosmic question: Should he put his faith in the God of Job or the unseen studio deity who phones in his commandments?

Mannix sweats it. Maybe the Coens do too. But their film never loses its exhilarating buoyancy. The Coens love these debauched children and the genre films they turn out with such batshit glee. Cinematographer Roger Deakins, production designer Jess Gonchor and costume designer Mary Zophres create visual bliss. *Hail, Caesar!* is a valentine to on-the-fly filmmaking, from two control freaks. And everything, nihilistic despair included, works like a charm. It's not easy to whip up a fizzy throwaway that's also a serious pleasure. Would that it 'twere so simple. Yet the Coens pull it off in style. They're indispensable.

# Hacking Their Way To the Top

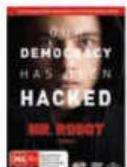
**Golden Globe-winning drama is the surprise smash of 2016**

By Michael Adams

## Mr. Robot

Rami Malek, Christian Slater

Created by Sam Esmail



Whoa, where did this come from? Rest assured, that's a natural reaction to a spiky, black-comic conspiratorial thriller that's equal parts *Taxi Driver*, *12 Monkeys* and *Fight Club*. Rami

Malek is your antihero Elliot, a hoodie-wearing, genius-level, depressed, drug-addicted and deeply antisocial cyber engineer who works for world-dominating E Corp while running a sideline as a self-styled vigilante hacker. But his bleak life is turned upside down – and given hope – when he's approached by the mysterious Mr. Robot to join hacktivist group 'fsociety' and bring down "Evil Corp".

Elliot is the best new male TV character in ages (it'd be great to see him hook up with Jessica Jones) and Malek is char-



ismatic and captivating with his haunted voiceover, comprised of self loathing, romantic longing, droll social commentary and Occupy-level rage. As Mr Robot, Christian Slater is at his, well, Christian Slater-iest, which is fun, and there are pleasingly complex female characters in Elliot's colleague Angela, strident hacker grrrl Darlene and sad dealer Shayla.

Creator Sam Esmail's scripts are tight and propulsive, his directors use New York

City locations strikingly and there's a paranoid 1970s-cinema vibe to the whole show. Great music and titles, too. Not for nothing did it win the Golden Globe for Best Drama. That said, there are peaks and troughs over the 10-episode run, but *Mr. Robot* establishes itself brilliantly and, with Esmail promising he knows where it's going and that it'll burn bright for a few seasons like *Breaking Bad* and then finish, it's time to get on board.



## The Dressmaker

Kate Winslet, Judy Davis

Directed by Jocelyn Moorhouse



Kate Winslet is terrific as Myrtle, who returns to her Australian country town 25 years after being drummed out for committing a murder. Now she's back to take care of crackpot mum (Davis, having a ball) and get revenge on the townsfolk using . . . her mad sewing skills. But that's only the main thread in a coat of many colours, all of them garish. *The Dressmaker* was a homegrown hit but it's also a hot mess, flailing about tonally and often falling into farce, though it's worth a look for its rude energy, strong performances, eye-popping costumes and cinematography.



## Spectre

Daniel Craig

Directed by Sam Mendes



Boffo trailer, shame about the film, James. After the bossiness of *Skyfall*, Bond stumbles back into convoluted *Quantum Of Solace* up-its-own-buttress. 007 is trying to stop global surveillance program Nine Eyes being put online by villain Franz Oberhauser with an assist from a traitor in British intelligence. The set pieces – chopper chaos in Mexico, car chase in Rome – are technically accomplished but by-the-numbers. Less forgivably, Christoph Waltz, whose story should make him the best Bond villain in years, misses the mark, eliciting shrugs rather than fear or wonder.



## Luther S4

Idris Elba, Rose Leslie

Created by Neil Cross



While this is officially Season Four, it's merely two episodes. Not that anyone told the writer because those 120 minutes are packed with enough story points for a year's worth of episodes. Unfortunately, what that means is we skim so fast from serial killer to police procedural to cold case to femme fatale Alice's fate that not much of it sticks. The central story – web-creep cannibal cuts and chomps a swathe through London – has suspenseful moments, but is diluted by all else shoehorned in. So much so that even Idris Elba's commanding Luther can't anchor proceedings.



## Crimson Peak

Mia Wasikowska

Directed by Guillermo del Toro



Guillermo del Toro's gothic romance is a sight to behold, a triumph of production design that dazzles with its primary set of crumbling mansion atop the titular mountain. This yarn has young Edith (Wasikowska, always great) wooed and wed and whisked to this remote location by Sir Thomas (Tom Hiddleston, creepy charming) and his weird sister Lucille (Jessica Chastain, show-stealing) only to be plagued by apparitions. As a murderous melodrama, *Crimson Peak* is great fun, but the ghostly goings-on become a bit of a CGI chore and Charlie Hunnam drags things down with his usual leaden delivery.



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### WHO POISONED FLINT?

[Cont. from 65] crisis," Schuette said in a press release.

His announcement was met with rolled eyes from Flint citizens. Schuette's response was likely a reaction to the announcement the previous week that the United States attorney for the Eastern District of Michigan was working with the EPA on a Flint investigation. (The feds provided no details of the scope of their probe.) Way back in September, state Rep. Sheldon Neeley had asked Schuette to get involved and start an investigation. Schuette didn't get back to him until shortly before Christmas, saying there were plenty of folks already looking into the Flint water crisis. Schuette only reversed course as pressure mounted and his political future came into question.

"Without fear or favour, I will carry out my responsibility to enforce the laws meant to protect Michigan families and represent the citizens of Flint," he said.

Did I mention Bill Schuette wants to be Michigan's next Republican governor?

**O**UT ON THE STREETS, FLINT NOW looks like a benevolently occupied city, which seems to have been Snyder's goal when he took over the town back in 2011. National Guardsmen working out of Flint firehouses handed out cases of water. Each firehouse was getting truck-loads of water every day. They were also handing out filters, one per household, and were providing testing kits. On the news, there was video of soldiers distributing water in Flint's poorest neighbourhoods, like the Marines did in Iraq after the fall of Saddam.

The government had finally mobilised. President Obama was sending \$5 million in federal aid. There were signs that Snyder was finally starting to get it, albeit a year too late. On January 19th, he gave his State of the State address, saying, "I am sorry, and I will fix it." He offered Flint \$28 million in relief. He released his e-mails on the water crisis, and all of Flint began reading, hoping to pinpoint exactly when his botching of the crisis began.

The EPA also fell on its sword, suggesting it should have pushed the state to more aggressively attack the poisoned water. "Our first priority is to make sure the water in Flint is safe, but we also must look at what the agency could have done differently," the EPA said in a statement. On the same day, Weaver met with President Obama, who appointed a "czar" to keep tabs on Flint.

Everyone was working together. It was beautiful until you thought about how long it had taken. We were now 600 days out from when Flint changed its water. While the water has been switched back to Detroit's system, no one knows when lead will stop leaching from the pipes, or

if it already has. One proposed solution is digging up the decrepit pipes across the city and repairing or replacing them. The cost could run from the millions to \$1.5 billion, according to Weaver. And that's if the city and state can find them. The listing of which homes get their water from modern pipes and which still use lead pipes is kept on 45,000 index cards at the Flint Department of Public Works.

What happens to Snyder and his underlings is an open question. In January, Flint residents filed multiple class-action suits against the governor and the state for exposing them to dangerous drinking water. Political blunders aside, the human costs are permanent and unforgivable. The damage to kids will be comprehensive and last a generation; the effect on learning rates, crime and other social ills is incalculable.

"You can't quantify the fear you see in the mothers' faces," says Hanna-Attisha. "They're just petrified what is going to happen to their kids in 10 years."

Flint has seen a spike in the number of cases of Legionnaires' disease, a severe type of pneumonia usually spread by bacteria in water vapour. The number of cases in Genesee County, Flint's home, has gone from six to 13 a year to 87 from June 2014 to November 2015, roughly the same time Flint began using water from the Flint River. There have been 10 deaths.

Earlier in the autumn, Congressman Kildee travelled to New York to hear the pope speak before the United Nations' General Assembly. He heard the pontiff say that every human being should have access to clean drinking water. Kildee's heart sank.

"I'm a citizen of the United States," he told me, "the richest country on the planet, at the richest moment in its history, and what the pope was referring to were poor children in Africa, not realising that my kids in Flint don't have clean drinking water."

Meanwhile, Hanna-Attisha has been losing sleep for months. When she dreams, she dreams of lead, the facts and figures of her studies spinning around in her brain. She spends her days thinking of a decade from now, when more Flint kids have ADD and more are introduced to the wrong side of the juvenile-court system. "We have to do the best for them we can," says Hanna-Attisha. "It's just a nightmare."

For Walters, the governor's apology was too little, too late. "I'm always going to wonder, if there's a problem with my kids, if it's because I let them drink that water," she told me as she loaded some garbage bags of her belongings into her nephew's truck outside her home.

She wasn't at Snyder's press conference. You see, LeeAnne Walters was done. She moved her family to Virginia, putting Flint in the rearview mirror.

I couldn't blame her.



## CHRIS MARTIN

[Cont. from 71] feels more relevant, like, two years ago. I get it, I haven't really spoken about it – I just don't want to be disrespectful to anyone's new relationships. I've lived a lot of life since then."

For example: Jennifer Lawrence. Martin and Lawrence reportedly dated off and on for much of last year. Martin won't discuss this or any of the other supposed women in his life, except to say that "if I was in another relationship – which I'm not confirming or denying – it might have been with someone really wonderful and great and amazing. This is, of course, speculative," he adds for emphasis. "You couldn't put it on a gossip site. I'm just telling you."

As a very famous, yet also extremely private, singer-songwriter, Martin is in a funny spot. It's inevitable that people will parse his songs for clues to his love life. Lyrics like "You make me feel like I'm alive again" on "Adventures of a Lifetime" have prompted rumours that it's about Lawrence. Martin says he won't dissect his songs, because he wants them to be "whatever someone wants them to be". "But all that speculation," he allows, "probably some of it is right. If there's a song about an amazing person making you feel great, you're probably not a million miles off."

As if that all weren't inclusive enough, the new album also includes backing vocals by Martin's current reported girlfriend, an English actress named Annabelle Wallis. Martin, of course, is mum. "Just because someone's singing on our album doesn't mean we're married," he says, slightly bristly. Which is totally fair. But I'm a little surprised that he would even have her on the album. Isn't he just inviting questions he doesn't want to answer?

At this point, Martin seems to reach the limit of discussing his relationships. "Well, maybe I fucked up," Martin says. "What should I have done? Should we change all the songs?" I apologise, tell him I just find it curious. "No, it's cool, man," he says. "I'm interested in this as well. If your life is a bit public...but you release music that's very personal...but you don't want your personal life to be public..." He laughs. "It's like, 'What are you doing here, son?'"

For a man who spent 10 years in a high-profile marriage, Martin has actually done an impressive job of flying below the radar tabloidwise. "I've only been in, like, two relationships – or two and a half," he says. "And it was never my decision to make it public." He best summed up his thinking in a 2011 Howard Stern interview, when he explained why he walks red carpets with his band but not Paltrow: "Our band is selling something....[Gwyneth and I] don't have anything to sell."

Which is noble and undoubtedly true. But if you're looking for privacy, there

must be better ways to go about it than dating the most popular actress in the country.

"Is this all just a secret ploy to get me to join Tinder?" Martin asks, laughing. "I see where you're going with this. But that's to deny the reality of who you meet. A lot of people who are accountants go out with other people in finance." And besides, he says, you can't choose who you fall for. "That's the crux of it, isn't it?" he says, then smiles. "Let me delightfully quote Selena Gomez and say, 'The heart wants what it wants', my brother."

**B**Y NOW APPLE'S CLASS IS ENDING, SO we head back so Martin can take her to her dance class a few kilometres away. In between, we have some time to kill, so we grab Thai food at a health-food cafe while Apple sits at the next table doing homework on her iPad. Martin requests that any more details about her stay off the record. But he probably wouldn't

## Coming off tour was tough for Martin: "You've got two years of being needed every night, and then it's gone."

mind it being said how fiercely and openly he adores her.

Both of Martin's kids are now at an age when they've begun to ask serious questions about the world. "Yesterday, Moses asked me, 'What's the Holocaust?'" Martin says. "I felt happy he hadn't experienced that [word], but bummed out to have to tell him." But they're also at an age when he can do fun stuff with them. Like two nights ago, he took Moses to a Lakers-Warriors game – courtside seats. "I'd never been to a Lakers game before," he says. "Talk about feeling grateful. My son loves Steph Curry, and he was right there." Jack Nicholson was also there, two seats away, separated only by a young woman. "I don't know if she was with Moses or Jack," Martin jokes. (Turns out it was Nicholson's daughter.)

In an especially gratifying development for Martin, he and the kids are also starting to make music together. Apple is learning to play guitar, and both sing on the new album. Sometimes they do silly projects at home, like using headphones to create their own silent disco, or recording their own creepy soundtrack for a Halloween maze they built. "We pitch-shifted the kids' vocals to make them sound really weird," Martin says. "It was scary!" He's impressed by their lack of tribalism

when it comes to music, and loves that they're turning him on to stuff – like Seleno's "Watch Me (Whip/Nae Nae)". "I'm not sure I can whip, but I can nae nae with the best of them," Martin says. They're even inspiring him to make his own music better. "Part of me wants to make sure the band is good, just so they're not embarrassed at school," he says. "I mean, really. Seriously."

For most of their existence, Coldplay have been a band that it's OK to make fun of – encouraged, even. It used to hurt Martin, a lot. "I had a couple of years in the mid-2000s where it was really confusing to me," he says. "I was like, 'Why is our band sometimes a punchline?'" Even in December, when the NFL announced they'd be performing at the Super Bowl, the Internet lit up with jokes about half-time naps.

Martin gets it. "We're an easy target," he says. "Just look at some of the stuff I've been saying to you. Anyone who says, 'Hey, why don't we just love each other and get along....' That's easy to slag off." He says he used to have very binary thoughts about the band: "I felt like either everyone likes us or everyone hates us." But now, "We're gonna do our thing," he says. "If you like it, wonderful, and if you don't, I really don't mind. There's so many other things you can do. You can have a PlayStation!"

His bandmates have noticed it too. "His armour is a lot thicker in a way," Champion says. "I think he'd be the first to admit he's worked quite hard on that."

"He deals with bad things better than ever," agrees Buckland. "When he was younger, he was highly strung and intense – but I think when you go through some stuff that destroys you, it makes you better as a person."

Now, "he's just like, 'Fuck it. This is where I am,'" says Harvey. "I think over the course of 16 years, he's released himself from the shackles of worrying what people are going to say."

For the moment, all of his anxious energy is directed only toward Super Bowl Sunday. "Right now, I'm thinking about 12 and a half minutes in February," he says. "To me, that's the climax of everything." Beyoncé will be joining them, reportedly along with Bruno Mars. The plan is to have them both onstage for about four minutes, with the band playing alone for the rest.

Last night, Martin ran through the Coldplay part of the set for one of their special guests. "And at the end of it," he says, "they said – in sort of a surprised way – 'Oh. You've got good songs.' I was like, 'Thank goodness!'" he says, cracking up. "Bruce [Springsteen] is up to four hours, and we're pushing the 10-minute mark. So say what you like about Coldplay. But after 15 years, we have eight and a half minutes that some people might agree is OK."

# Ian Astbury, The Cult

**The British rocker on meeting Bowie, making his own food and playing with the Doors**

By Robyn Doreian

#### The last time I swore at the telly

December 12th, during the Jose Aldo vs Conor McGregor featherweight fight in Las Vegas. It was a 13-second knockout. I'd paid 70 bucks to watch it. [Laughs]

#### The last time I prayed

I don't really pray, but I meditate daily. It calibrates me and grounds my spirit. My first real instruction came in the 1980s, via Alan Watts, a Zen Buddhist priest. I listened to a cassette tape of him doing a dissertation on meditation. He was kind of a de facto religious guru for Beat writers like Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg.

#### The last time I cooked for someone

This morning. I cooked an egg white omelette for my wife, Aimee [Nash, Black Ryder singer/bassist]. She's an Aussie. We've been married for three years. I am a pescetarian. I will eat fish, as long as they are wild caught, otherwise I eat vegetarian. I train in mixed martial arts, so conditioning and diet are important. We make a lot of our own food. That way we know what we are eating.

#### The last time I caught public transport

The Metro. The last time I was in Paris. But I live in Los Angeles, where everyone drives. My car is a SRT8 Dodge Charger, a total guy's car. [Laughs] It's my last gas-guzzler. My next car will be a hybrid.

#### The last time I was star struck

I've met artists I've admired like Mick Jagger, Robert Plant, Eric Clapton and Iggy Pop, but the only time I've been star struck was meeting David Bowie. The Cult opened for him in Paris on the Glass Spider Tour. When we met, he was so present. He made me feel like I was a familiar friend. As a young person of 25, looking for some kind of guidance, he gave me attention and focus, which made me feel acknowledged. He was genuinely interested in our conversation. It was a very profound meeting. "Life on Mars?" was the first single I ever bought. I was 10. I probably spent more intimate time with his music than I did my own parents: on headphones, in my bedroom, in my car. I listened to *Young Americans* through to the Berlin period and beyond, and bought every record he made. Then I went back and listened to his



**“The last time I cried? When David Bowie died.”**

music constantly throughout my life. I saw him play about 12 times, and met him five or six.

#### The last time I tried to get something for free

I don't really go for that. I pay my own way in life. I don't hustle for anything free. Even for concerts, I buy my own tickets rather than ask to be put on a guest list. The last ones I bought were for Beach House.

#### The last record I bought

*Blackstar* by David Bowie. I ordered it before it came out. I buy quite a lot of vinyl: we've got between 3,500-4,000 pieces. Records are strewn throughout our house. We have three turntables. I love the whole ritu-

al of taking a record out of a sleeve, putting it on, and immersing myself in that music. It's an amazing format. There's a mystical quality to vinyl.

#### The last time I forgot a lyric

Probably in rehearsal today. [Laughs] It didn't happen often, though, when I played with the Doors of the 21st Century [150 shows, beginning in 2002], as I knew how incredibly important the lyrics were. I had to learn 40 songs in six weeks, and for six weeks, I did just that. But I probably fluffed a few playing with them. It happens. You get distracted.

#### The last time I cried

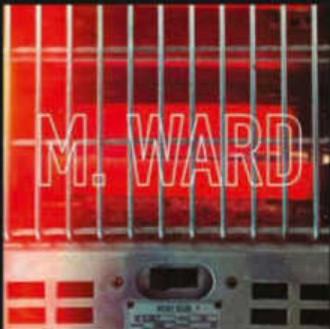
When David [Bowie] died on January 10th. I cried each day for two weeks. I wasn't thinking about it, just feeling the loss. I have such gratitude for having him in my life, as an artist, and as a mentor. If I could speak to him now I would say, "I love you." And "thank you". Simple as that.

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# [PIAS]



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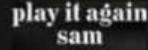
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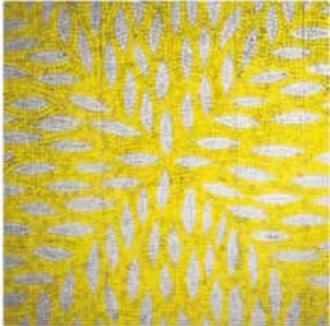
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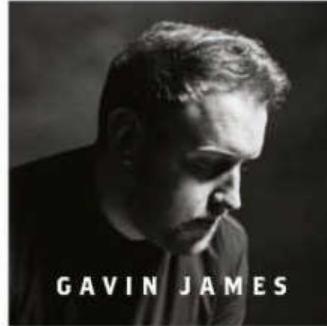
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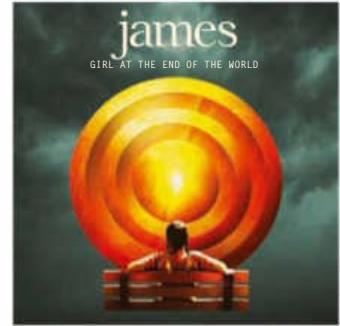
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